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BY VERAX



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"Were I asked what best dignifies the present and consecrates the past; what alone enables us to draw in the Tale of Life; what sheds the ous reason; what gives the firmest eligion; what is best fitted to soften an and elevate his soul—I would sses, it is 'EXPERIENCE.'"

LORD LYTTON.

ROBERT W WOODRUFF
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HEAD HOTEL, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE.
to-day allow me to present you with and Poem on ENO'S justly celebrated My occupation being a very sedentary o see what changes of air would do for sh of some personal friends, I have taken LT,' and the good result therefrom is my sing you.

"A LADY."

, Sir, yours truly,
etite it will enforce,
p the system in its course;
you've ate or drank too much,
estore like magio touch.
ion, with its fearful away,
s electric-like away;
he Blood is found impure,
flect a perfect cure.

ym danger, free from harm,
like some magician's charm
time a dainty draught,
will dispel disease's shaft;
riceless than the richest gold,
er did its wealth unfold;
throughout our native land
always have it at oommand."

late Rev. J. W. NEIL, Holy Church, North Shields :—

—As an illustration of the beneficial effects IT SALT,' I give you particulars of the my friends. Sluggish liver and bilious ected him, that he was obliged to live hair use. This did nothing in effecting also consulting very eminent members enjoys vigorous health; he has never and can partake of his food in a hearty ficial, that you may well extend its use pro
"J. W. NEIL."

manner. There are others of whom you may have heard. I find it makes a very refreshing and invigorating drink—I remain, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

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BY
NAT. GOULD
'VERAX'

AUTHOR OF "THE DOUBLE EVENT," "RUNNING IT OFF,"¹ ETC.

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS, LIMITED
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL
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JOCKEY JACK.

CHAPTER I.

HOMELESS.

A BITTER night. The rain falling in a pitiless torrent, flooding the streets and filling the broad Melbourn gutters with a rush of water.

It was evident the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street had been exceptionally full, judging by the crowd streaming from the various entrances.

Coming down the dress circle stairs might be noticed a man who was evidently known to many of the fashionable crowd present, although it could be guessed he was not one of them.

At his side, holding his hand, and looking the picture of happy childish glee, was a young girl, not more than ten years of age. The men nodded to her father in a familiar manner, and several ladies smiled at the child's excited eager face.

"It's a fearful night, Hettie. We must have a hansom, and get home as fast as we can," said the man.

They had reached the pavement now, and he was

looking about for a hansom, but there were very few there, and they were engaged.

"We shall have to take a waggonette," he said.

Hettie pouted, and said :

"I don't like them, dad. Do get a hansom."

"I'll get yer a hansom, sir," said a voice close at his elbow.

He turned, and saw a ragged little urchin shivering in the cold, and wet to the skin.

"Poor little fellow," said Hettie, with tears starting to her eyes ; "how cold he must be, dad."

The youngster was a pitiful object to look at. He was very small, and lightly made. His face was intelligent, and he had a pair of bright blue eyes which looked wistfully under Hettie's hood into her pretty face. His clothes were ragged and torn, and his hat barely protected him from the wet. His little feet were bare, and he rubbed his small hands together to warm them.

"I'm a bit cold, missy, I can tell yer," he said. "Let me run for a 'ansom, sir, it'll warm me up."

"All right, young 'un, be sharp," was the reply, and off the urchin darted at top speed.

"He can run, anyway," said the man.

"What a little chap he is, dad," said Hettie. "I wonder has he any home?"

The lad was not long away, and returned with a hansom, and a decent-looking nag in the shafts.

"That'll do, boy. You've not been long. Here's a shilling for you."

He put his little girl in the cab, and turned to look at the boy.

"Where's your home?"

"Got none, sir."

"How old are you, my lad?"

"Dunno exactly, sir, but expects I'm about ten."

"My lassie's age," he thought.

"Come along, dad," came from the cab.

"This poor little lad says he's no home, Hettie. Fancy leaving him out here all night."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Take him home, dad. He can sleep in the boys' rooms," and Hettie's head, with the red hood over it, peered out of the front of the cab.

"Hallo, Dalton. What have you got here?" said a cheery voice.

"Oh, it's you, Flushton, is it," said Ned Dalton, for such was his name, but he did not speak in a very cordial manner.

"Yes, I'm alive and kicking. How's the wife? What, you've got Miss Pert there?" he laughed, as he glanced at Hettie in the cab.

The girl heard him and tossed her pretty head. Mr. Flushton was evidently no favourite of hers.

"Mrs. Dalton's all serene," said Ned Dalton; "you're out late on such a beastly night. Been to the rooms?"

"No. I've been at Sir William Melissa's. I'm an old friend of her ladyship's, and consequently am made welcome there," said Flushton.

Dalton looked quickly at him.

"I didn't know you were a friend of Sir William's," he said; "he's rather particular about his acquaintances."

Flushton saw the cut he had received, but took no notice of it. He merely said, as he walked on :

"Sir William is particular, Dalton, and it is therefore the more satisfactory he regards me as his friend. Good night."

"You're no friend of his, I'll bet," thought Dalton ; "you're nobody's friend except your own, that's my belief. Whew! it's cold. We'll get home," and he jumped into the cab. The driver evidently knew him, and started off. The shivering lad on the pavement looked at the cab, and then at the shilling in his hand, and stood still, thinking where he should get a square meal and spend the night.

"Where's the boy?" said Hettie, as the cab moved on.

"Oh, I'd forgotten him," and Dalton stopped the cab. "Is that lad I was talking to there, yet?" he asked the cabman, who looked back and said he was.

"Then drive back," said Dalton.

"What the devil's up with him to-night?" muttered the cabman, as he turned the horse round.

When the lad saw the cab returning, he wondered what could be the matter.

It stopped opposite him, and he heard Dalton say :

"Here, my lad, jump in here, and curl yourself up on the floor in a corner, and we'll see if we can't bed you down for the night in a stable or somewhere."

The lad opened his eyes wide, but he scrambled into the cab without the slightest hesitation, and snuggled down in the corner.

"Home," said Dalton.

The cab pulled up at a neat-looking house, and

Dalton flung open the doors. As he did so the lad rolled against the splash-board, and the shock woke him up.

"Been asleep, young 'un ? Dare say you're tired," said Dalton. "Come, wake up, and tumble out."

Hettie ran into the house, and was soon in her mother's arms.

"Dad's brought a poor little starved lad home, mother," she said. "He's such a mite."

"Drat him !" said Mrs. Dalton, but not at all bad humouredly. "He's a heart as big as a melon. He ought to have been a charity organization."

Dalton came up the walk, the lad following him.

"Well, he's a nice beauty," said Mrs. Dalton. Then, after a good look at him, she said :

"He's hardly any clothes on. Bless my soul, Ned, how uncommon cold he must be."

"I should say he wasn't over warm," said Ned, divesting himself of his overcoat, "and he looks as if a meal would do him good. Give him some beef and ham, and some hot coffee, that'll settle him."

The lad's mouth fairly watered, and such an eager expectant look came into his eyes, that Mrs. Dalton, good motherly woman that she was, caught him by the neck, and calling out, "Sarah, Sarah," took him in the direction of the kitchen.

Sarah, a demure, prim maid, held up her hands aghast at the sight.

"Feed him, Sarah. He's starving," said Mrs. Dalton. "Are you hungry, my lad ?"

"Ain't I jest," he said. "You try me."

"Come along," said Sarah, and in a very short

space of time the homeless wanderer of the Melbourne streets was pitching ham and beef and bread into him at a rate to make Sarah stare.

"Yer can't have had much ter eat, lad," she said.

"No—n—no,—not—much," he got out with difficulty, as his mouth was chock full.

The urchin seemed ravenous. Would he never stop eating? Then he poured three large cups of hot coffee down. At last he laid his knife and fork down, and gave a deep sigh, while tears almost came into his eyes.

"What's the matter, my lad?" said Sarah, who seemed to possess a heart of somewhat the same tender material as her master and mistress.

"I'm sorry I can't eat no more," said the lad, with such a doleful expression of countenance that Sarah laughed.

"Have you had a good feed, youngster?" said Dalton, as he entered the kitchen.

"Yes, sir, thank yer kindly."

"Then come with me, and I'll fix you up for the night," and he led the way by aid of a lantern out at the back door. He had a blanket on his arm, and some old boy's clothes. He pulled open the door, and called "Bob."

"Hallo, sir," said the individual addressed, in a half sleepy voice.

"There's a lad in the loft, don't disturb him in the morning."

"Alright, sir," said Bob.

"There, young 'un, make yourself comfortable. Pull those wet togs off, and roll yourself up in this

blanket, and put these clothes on in the morning. If you're a good lad, maybe I'll find a job for you, and you can earn a bit of money."

"You're very good, sir," said the lad. "I'll be ever such a good lad. My, ain't it nice and warm here. Ain't it, just. You bet I'll sleep here, sir."

"That's right. Now turn in. By the bye, what's your name, my lad?"

"Jack, sir," was the reply.

"Jack. What's your other name?"

"Ain't got none that I knows of, sir," said the lad.

"Poor little chap. Well, lie there till you're called in the morning."

"All right, sir," and, rolled in his blanket, Jack was fast asleep on his bed of clean straw almost before Dalton had reached the house again.

"Have you fixed him, Ned?" said Mrs. Dalton. "Hettie's gone to bed tired out."

"Bless the lass. I've put him right, Mag," said Dalton. "There's something about that little chap I like. I'll bet he's honest."

"Do you mean to keep him?" said Mrs. Dalton.

"If he turns out handy. I want a couple more lads, and he's just the make. He's young, too, and I can teach him better," said Dalton.

"It's my belief, Ned, you'd make room for forty boys if they asked you. But he does look an intelligent lad. What's his name?"

"Jack, he says, and hasn't got another."

"The old tale, I expect," said Mrs. Dalton. "A stray child cast on the world to live or die as Providence sees fit."

Little Jack lay snug and warm in his blanket. He slept like a top, and for once in his life had pleasant dreams in which a confused mass of ideas floated through his mind. The rain dashed against the building furiously, but he heard it not. Homeless, outcast, street arab Jack had struck a piece of luck which was about to change the whole course of his life.

CHAPTER II.

"YOU'LL DO YOUNG 'UN."

WHEN Jack opened his eyes next morning, the sunlight was streaming in at the windows of the loft and almost blinded him, so dazzling was its brilliancy.

He rubbed his eyes and stared about him, unable at first to comprehend where he was. He felt so warm and snug, he had half a mind to turn over and go to sleep again. Then he recollected the scene of the night before, and how he had been taken out of the wet, cold street by a kind gentleman and a beautiful young girl. At the remembrance of the supper his mouth watered, and he smiled quietly to himself.

Jack was not half a bad-looking little chap. True, he was not very clean, and his long, curly hair was unkempt, but he had clear blue eyes and an honest face, which, when lighted up with a happy smile, looked pleasant and attractive. He wondered if he would be allowed to remain in his present quarters, or be turned out into the street again. At the latter prospect he shivered, and snuggled down into his blanket on the straw bed. This stable loft seemed a perfect paradise to homeless little Jack after the hardships he had undergone. He was roused from a half-doze by a voice shouting :

"Now then, you young brat, get up. It's time you came down if you want any breakfast."

A head appeared at the top of the ladder, and Jack, looking up, saw for the first time Bob Sharpe, Ned Dalton's head lad.

Jack liked that face although the voice was gruff. Bob Sharpe was designated "head lad," but as a matter of fact he was several years past the age when individuals are usually addressed by that term. He was no lad, but a miniature man well developed, strong, but small.

Jack smiled at him, and didn't seem a bit alarmed. He said :

"Boss told me to stop here till I were called. If there's any breakfast about, you bet I'll get up."

This speech from such a child, "a mere baby" Bob called him, surprised Mr. Sharpe, and he said :

"You're uncommon smart with your tongue, youngster, but you're none the worse for that, although if you don't look out it may get you into trouble here."

"May I stop here?" said Jack, eagerly.

"Get up at let's look and you," said Bob Sharpe.

Jack scrambled to his feet and stood erect, and a very small fellow he seemed.

Sharpe eyed him over, then climbed up into the loft, and lifted Jack up in both arms. He put him down somewhat gently, and again scanned him critically.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Reckon I'm about ten," said Jack.

"You're just the build. Master must keep you

here. Now mind what I say, young 'un, if you're a good lad I'll be your friend, if not, well I'll make things mighty unpleasant for you."

"I'll be good," said Jack. "Only let me stop here. It's so cold out in the streets at night."

"Come down to breakfast as soon as you're dressed," said Bob, as Jack commenced to scramble into the dry clothes Dalton had given him the previous night.

He then climbed down the ladder, and went out.

He ran across to the kitchen, and opened the door, where he saw four lads sitting at a table having their morning meal.

"Well, Mop," said one of the lads to Jack, "what are you staring at?"

The "mop" was evidently an allusion to the state of Jack's head, and the "staring" to the ardent gaze he cast upon the eatables.

"I reckon that's good," said Jack, pointing to a nice pie of considerable dimensions.

"Yes, it's passable," said the lad who had spoken before.

"Passable!" said Sarah, who was present. "Well things is comin' to a pretty pass when stable brats can talk in this fashion."

"Never mind, Sally, you're a good sort," said another of the "boys," "Toddy's a bit off this mornin'. He got chucked off old Primrose, and didn't he come a cropper neither."

This was Sarah's chance for revenge, so she said:

"He never could ride. He'll have to take a few

lessons from this little chap before long, or I'm mistaken," she said, pointing at Jack.

"Much you know about ridin'," said Toddy, angrily; "as for that kid, he's not pluck enough to get on a horse, I'll bet, much less ride one."

"Ain't I," said Jack; "you jest try me."

"Bravo, little man," said Ned Dalton, who had just come upon the scene, and heard his words. "We'll try you after breakfast and see what sort of stuff you are made of."

After Jack had had a good meal, he went into the yard again, and saw the lads busily engaged grooming down several horses, and he looked on, evidently delighted.

"Now youngster, come here," said Dalton. "Have you ever been on a horse?"

Now as it happened, young though Jack was, he had been several times on horseback, for he was constantly hanging about livery-stables and cab-yards, and the men used him to walk their horses about occasionally, and at times he had been put up on a roughish customer "just for a lark," so Jack answered:

"Yes, I've been on horses, but I can't ride much, sir. But I ain't afraid," he added, quickly.

"Come along, we'll try you."

Primrose was brought out, and Jack lifted into the saddle. He hadn't been much used to a saddle, but he said nothing, and looked determined.

The horse walked quietly into the paddock, and then cantered about in high good humour. Jack held firmly on, and stuck his knees in tight.

Dalton eyed him closely.

"Canter him," he said.

Jack gave Primrose a kick, and the horse lashed out and threw his tiny rider on to his neck, but he was quickly in the saddle again.

Primrose cantered round the grass ring, and Jack sat firmly in his seat. He felt quite elated. Suddenly, without warning, Primrose swerved quickly round, and threw Jack heavily to the ground. He was up in a minute, and looked ruefully after the horse, which had trotted to the gate.

Dalton laughed, as Jack came up and said :

"Put me up again, sir. Let me have another ride."

Dalton lifted him into the saddle, but said nothing. As Primrose walked away, he quietly switched him behind. The horse lashed out, but Jack kept his seat. He then swerved round again, but this time his rider was ready for the move, and did not come off. The horse, seemingly satisfied, cantered gently along, and Jack pulled him up at the gate again.

Dalton lifted him off, as Sharpe took the horse, and said :

"You'll do, young 'un. I think I can make a rider of you some day. Would you like to be a jockey?"

"Shouldn't I," said Jack, with his eyes shining with delight.

"Then I'll try and make you one. You've no parents, my little man, so they can't object," he said.

"Well, Sharpe, what do you think of him?"

"He'll make a rider one of these days, sir. He's

just built for it. He's the sort of cove to ride about seven stone when he's nearly a man," said Bob.

"Then I'll keep him, at any rate," said Dalton. "He'll have a good show here, I reckon."

"He's lucky to get into your stable, Mr. Dalton," said Bob.

"Please, sir," said Jack, "are you Teddy Dalton?" and he looked quite awestruck.

Dalton laughed outright, the lad looked so much in earnest.

"Teddy Dalton," he said. "What do you know of Teddy Dalton?"

"Why, he won the Cup with Daystar," said Jack, in a trembling voice, as though such an event must be the height of ambition.

"So he did," said Dalton. "How did you know? It's before you were born."

"But I've heard the lads talk about it, and Jimmy at Inglis' said Teddy Dalton were the best trainer in Australia, and that no man alive could have won the Cup with Daystar but him."

In spite of himself Dalton looked pleased at such praise even from "Jimmy at Inglis'." That victory of Daystar had made him for life. "Yes, I'm Teddy Dalton, young 'un," he said.

Jack looked thunderstruck as he wonderingly said:

"And you had Daystar?"

"Yes," said Dalton, smiling.

"And you'll take me here, sir?" said Jack.

"I will, my lad," said Dalton, patting his head.

This was too much for Jack. He did not cry or

express his thanks in incoherent words, but he capered about and shouted for joy.

"That'll do," shouted Dalton, as Jack turned a somersault in his glee.

When Dalton had gone, Sharpe said to Jack: "The master's taken up with you. I think it is because you're about the same age as Master Willie when he died. I'll teach you what I can, young 'un, if you behave yourself."

Jack had indeed found a home at last, and how good a one he was to experience in the future.

So Jack was established at Hairbell Cottage, and became a stable lad in the crack racing establishment at Newmarket.

Some weeks afterwards Jack was grooming down his old friend Primrose when Hettie looked in at the door of the box, and her father stood close behind.

"Good morning, Jack," she said.

"Good mornin', miss," said Jack, touching his hair.

"That's Primrose, isn't it?"

"Yes, miss."

"That's such a nice name, dad," she said. "What's Jack's other name?" she asked. "I've never heard it, what is it, Jack?"

"Don't know as I ever had another name, miss," he said.

"Oh, but you must have another name."

"Never heard of one, miss," he replied.

"Then we must give you one. Let me see," said the demure young ten-year-old lassie, meditatively.

"You're to be a jockey, aren't you?"

"Yes please, miss," said Jack.

"I've got it, dad," she said, as she clapped her hands and startled Primrose. "I'll christen him Jockey Jack."

Her father laughed, as he replied :

"Capital, Hettie. That name will stick to him, you see if it doesn't. How do you like it, Jack?"

"Grand, sir," said Jack. "I hope I'll be a real Jockey Jack some day."

It was soon whispered about the yard that Jack had been given a nickname by Miss Hettie. The news travelled to Flemington training-ground, and in a very short time the poor little shivering waif Ned Dalton had taken out of the streets that pouring wet cold night was known to all the stable lads around Newmarket as Jockey Jack.

CHAPTER III.

TEN YEARS AFTER.

"JOCKEY JACK," as he was called in a moment of childish fun by Hettie Dalton, had no reason to regret the day he was taken care of by Ned Dalton. He had now been ten years in the trainer's stables, and had already commenced to earn fame as a smart, reliable rider.

Jockey Jack was, at twenty years of age, a good-looking youth. True, he was small, and built on exceedingly light lines, but for all that he was a neat young man, and by no means tainted with stable slang. Jack had been educated by a teacher, who at Dalton's request had taken special pains with the boy, and found him an apt pupil eager to learn.

After his work was done Jack would proceed to his teacher's house, and work hard for two or three hours at his task, and he quickly became a very fair scholar. He could write well, and had learned to speak in an orthodox fashion.

As a horseman he had become proficient, and Ned Dalton was heard to remark upon several occasions that if he had a crack he wanted well and honestly ridden he'd as soon put Jockey Jack up as any man he knew.

One incident, however, had brought him into note. It occurred a few months before the time of which we are speaking. It was in the Mocnee Valley Cup race just before the great Melbourne meeting.

Ned Dalton had a horse of his own called Seabreeze entered, which he fancied had a good outside show. He determined to give Jockey Jack the mount, and although Bob Sharpe was against this, Dalton stuck to his resolution.

When the day of the race arrived he called Jockey Jack into his private room and told him he wanted him to ride Seabreeze in the Moonee Valley Cup.

How Jack's heart jumped at this. He felt quite elated, and determined to ride all he knew to win

"I'll do my best, Mr. Dalton," he said, "and it's a great favour you are showing me."

"I can trust you, I know, Jack. If you manage to win it will do you more good than all I can say in your favour."

When Jack had first ridden in races there had been some difficulty as to his name, but this was settled by Dalton stating his surname was Jack, and this name always went up on the board.

So when it was seen Jack was on Seabreeze for the Cup, the public at once came to the conclusion the horse could not be much fancied, or a more experienced jockey would have been put up.

This was what Dalton expected, and although he would not have backed his horse at a short price, he accepted several hundreds to ten about his show.

The race need not be described. It will suffice to say that Seabreeze won by a head, beating a red-

hot favourite, and that Jack rode in a most skilful manner.

Dalton was so pleased with the lad that he gave him five-and-twenty pounds, which Jack at once deposited in the bank for safe keeping, and felt himself quite a rich man.

One of the principal patrons of Dalton's stables was Sir William Melissa, who, for the past two or three years, had gone in rather extensively for racing.

He had, however, quarrelled with his trainer, and his horses had been in the Hairbell Cottage stables a few months. Among the half dozen he now had there was a splendidly bred horse by Musket—Queen of the Night, one of the best stud mares ever put to that great sire. He was called Blue Blood, and was a beautiful bronze bay with a peculiar white face, which made him very conspicuous. Blue Blood was a four-year-old, and had hitherto been an utter failure, despite his good breeding and good looks.

It so happened that Blue Blood had been trained by Robert Marlow, better known as Dolly Marlow on account of his foppish style of dressing. Hector Flushton, a well-known man about town, with not a particularly good character, had three horses in the same stable. It may be remembered that Hector Flushton was the man who had spoken to Dalton as he stood outside the Theatre Royal the night he took Jack under his protection.

Sir William Melissa fancied all had not been quite straight with Blue Blood, and after backing him heavily twice, and losing, he was determined to try a change of trainers.

When the horses came into Dalton's hands he at once picked out Blue Blood as the best of the lot, much to Sir William's delight.

Dalton had not the horse long under his care before he found he was a real flyer, but he had doubts as to his staying powers. "He's bred to stay, Sir William," he said to that gentleman, as they stood looking at the horse, "but I don't fancy he can go two miles, myself. However, we'll try him. Time will show. Of one thing I'm certain, he's a real good' un, and a wonder for a maiden. How on earth Marlow lost that last race with him I don't know. It looked a certainty."

"I was sold over that race," said Sir William. "It was over that very race I took the horse away. Who looks after the horse, Dalton? He certainly is well attended to."

"Jack has him in charge," said Dalton.

"Jack. Is that the lad they call Jockey Jack?" asked Sir William.

"Yes, that's the lad, Sir William. Here he comes," said Dalton, as Jack came across the yard. "This is Sir William Melissa, Jack, he has been complimenting us on Blue Blood's condition."

Jack touched his hat, and smiled, evidently gratified at the praise he received.

"Look after that horse well, my lad," said Sir William, "and I'll not forget you."

"I will, sir," said Jack. "I like the horse, and I think he likes me."

"So you're called Jockey Jack," said Sir William. "You've a history of your own, I expect."

"I have," said Jack, and a shade of sadness crossed his face. "I've no name, Sir William, but that matters little. If I get the chance I'll let everybody know that when Jockey Jack's up they'll have a run for their money."

"That's right," said Sir William, smiling. "Always keep that in mind, and you'll never go far wrong. Is he a good jockey, Dalton?"

"I don't want to flatter him," said Dalton, "but he's level with the best of 'em, in my opinion, Sir William."

"Then he shall ride Blue Blood if he can get to the weight when the horse is fit to run," said Sir William.

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, very pleased. "I hope it will be a win, Sir William."

"So do I. Haven't had much luck of late," he said.

"That's the lad that rode Seabreeze at Moonee Valley in the Cup," said Dalton, as Sir William sat down in the trainer's pleasant little snugery to have a quiet cigar.

"By Jove, so it is, I'd forgotten that," said Sir William; "and he rode him well too. I ought to recollect it, for he beat one of my horses in that very race."

"He's a steady, honest lad," said Dalton. "I picked him up when he was nearly starving in Melbourne streets, and well he repaid me. That lad has a history, I feel sure, Sir William."

Dalton saw his visitor to the door, and raised his hat as Sir William drove away in his dog-cart, with his little "tiger" sitting behind like a statue.

"Where the devil have I seen that lad's countenance before?" thought Sir William, as he drove rapidly along. "It's curious, but I'm certain I know that face."

Sir William Melissa lived in the Richmond Road, and drove rapidly in that direction.

A groom stood at the horse's head as he threw down the reins and got out of the dog-cart. He entered the house and went into a morning-room.

A lady reclined indolently in an easy-chair, in a graceful attitude, reading a novel, evidently of a deeply interesting nature, for she did not look up as he entered. He walked to the fire-place, and commenced pulling off his driving-gloves.

"You're deep in your book, Nora," he said; "is it so uncommonly interesting?"

"Rather," she said, and then looked up as she asked: "Where have you been?"

He was not looking at her, as he answered, "To Dalton's. I wanted to have a look at Blue Blood."

She was looking at him now, and had laid down her book.

Sir William raised his eyes, and as he glanced at her face he started visibly with a look of puzzled surprise.

"You're nervous to-day, William," said Lady Melissa. "Are you quite sure you've been nowhere else but to see Blue Blood?"

He was still looking at her, but did not speak.

Lady Melissa became irritated.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" she

said. "I asked you if you'd been anywhere but to see Blue Blood?"

"No," he said, evidently thinking about something else.

Sir William went out of the room and into his study.

He sat down and lighted a cigar. He smoked it, and then lighted another. He took up the *Evening Herald* upside down, and pretended to read it. He put it down again, and lighted a third cigar. When he had finished that, he seemed to have settled something in his mind, for he said half aloud to himself:

"What a remarkable resemblance."

CHAPTER IV.

MY LADY MELISSA.

LADY MELISSA was a woman with a history, at least so said her acquaintances, and they were not far wrong.

Ten years ago Sir William Melissa was a gay young man, sowing his wild oats in a fast set in Melbourne. In the course of his peregrinations about town he became acquainted with Miss Nora Gardner. She was engaged in one of the hotels in the city, and held a responsible position. Miss Gardner was considered a model of propriety, and no one could say a word against her.

She had received a good education, and most people thought she came of a good family, but poor, and that she had come out to Australia because her position could be more independent.

The more Sir William saw of her the more he admired her. He was not in love with her, he would have scouted such an idea, but his attentions became daily more marked. His friends at last commenced to chaff him about her, and this somewhat annoyed him.

Hector Flushton, one of those gentlemen who have no occupation, and live remarkably well on nothing at all certain, was also an admirer of Miss Gardner.

Matters went on slowly for some time, until Sir William, against the advice of his friends, seriously thought of marrying Miss Gardner.

When he put the question to her he was surprised to meet with a flat refusal. He was not daunted, but persevered in his suit. Her obstinacy only made him the more eager to have his way.

Determined to try his luck again he requested a private interview with her, and she granted it.

They remained together for an hour or more, when it was decided the wedding should take place quickly.

After almost ten years of married life Sir William had not yet learned to understand his wife. He could never quite make her out. He questioned very much whether she had ever loved him. He had no fault to find with her. She had been a credit to him, and had fulfilled her duties as his wife admirably. They had no children, and this was a sore point with Sir William.

As for Lady Melissa, she was secretly pleased there had been no issue from the marriage. She was contented with her lot. She told herself this scores of times, and yet she felt it was not true. Sir William was kind to her—at least, he let her have her own way as much as she liked.

Some secret sorrow or care seemed to prey upon her mind at times. She brooded a good deal, and her gaiety was often forced. In a fit of good fellowship, which he sometimes showed without just cause, Sir William invited Hector Flushton to his house, and that gentleman had taken good care that the acquaintance should not drop.

Of late, however, Flushton had seen a good deal of Lady Melissa, and his visits did not seem to give her much pleasure. Sir William did not like the man, but he was too easy-going to show it.

Lady Melissa sat in her chair after Sir William left her, as recorded in the last chapter, and the novel she was reading fell from her hand.

She seemed lost in a reverie, and not of the pleasantest kind.

"How strange he looked at me," she thought. "What on earth did he do that for? He evidently fancied he saw something peculiar about me. I ought to be happy. He's a good husband, and spares no expense where I am concerned. Why did he marry me? I'm sure he never loved me. How I wish he had. How I wish he would. It was because I loved him I did not wish to marry him. The temptation was too strong. I did wrong in yielding to it, but that's over, and I must make the best of it. Why can't he love me a little. Perhaps it's better as it is."

Few people would have believed Lady Melissa loved her husband, yet such was the case. She was a remarkable woman, and might have been a great woman had fate so willed it. Lady Melissa presented the extraordinary phenomenon of a wife who loved her husband, and yearned for his love in return, and yet endeavoured as gently yet firmly as possible to keep his love at a distance, if not to crush it altogether. Why she did it she alone knew, and she alone was aware she acted such a part. It cost her many a severe struggle to meet Sir William in a cool, constrained, formal manner, when she would have given

worlds to throw her arms around his neck and tell him how deeply she loved him.

She had grown even colder of late since Hector Flushton's visits had been more frequent.

Was it of this man or her husband she was thinking now as she murmured :

"I fear him. His looks tell me he fancies he knows something which will give him power over me. What can it mean? Last time he was here he said at parting, 'I have some news for you, Lady Melissa, but it will keep. I am sure you will be delighted to hear it, because it concerns a very old and dear friend of yours'."

It must be of Hector Flushton she is thinking.

"An old and dear friend of mine," she mused. "I have no old and dear friend——"

The word remained unfinished. Lady Melissa's face had suddenly blanched. She hid it in her hands.

"Not that," she almost moaned. "Surely, not that. No, a thousand times no. He's dead. He died at The Towers, in Queensland. I saw it in the papers. The particulars were correct. I wrote to the hospital, and the answer was the same. It cannot be that. What is it Hector Flushton means? God, how a woman has to suffer for one act of folly! And I love him so. Oh, it is too much; too much."

Lady Melissa in tears. She was indeed a remarkable woman. A woman with a history.

"I'm going out, Norah," said her husband's voice at the door.

She composed herself, and said, with a faint tremor in her voice :

"It's late, is it not? Must you go out to-night?"

He felt there was something different in her voice. It did not seem so cold and distant.

He came into the room, and bending over her, said, "Would you like me to stay in, Nora?"

"Yes," she replied. "I'm nervous, William. I don't feel myself."

It was not often she called him William and his heart gave a bound, even after ten years of married life. She was a beautiful woman.

"Then I'll stay with you," he said, gaily.

"Thank you so much," she said.

Lady Melissa remembered that night long afterwards. She entered into Sir William's conversation with eagerness and zest. He talked about his race-horses, of which he was very fond, and interested her in the fortunes of Blue Blood and his trainer.

"I nearly forgot to tell you, Nora, about a good action my trainer, Dalton, did some years ago. I only heard it this morning. My horses have not been there long, you know."

"So you've discovered a philanthropic trainer. Wonders will never cease," she laughed.

"Yes, Dalton's a paragon. Fancy, just ten years ago he found a ragged little urchin in the cold and rain outside the Theatre Royal one night as he was leaving with his daughter—by-the-way, she's a deuced nice girl, I've heard. The lad got him a cab, and, by some means or other, Dalton thought he'd take the little fellow home and bed him down for the night. He did so, and the fellow's been there ever since."

"Really!" said Lady Melissa. "Quite romantic. I suppose he'll marry the trainer's daughter?"

"Don't laugh, Nora," said Sir William; "it's all true. But who do you think the lad is?"

"How should I know?" she replied.

"Why, it's the lad they call Jockey Jack, the fellow who rode so well and beat me in the Moonee Valley Cup. I'm going to let him have the mount on Blue Blood in the first big race he runs for."

"Jockey Jack. What a curious name!" said Lady Melissa.

"I fancied Jockey Jack was like you in the face and features. There's a compliment for you, isn't it?"

Lady Melissa seemed about to faint. She grasped the chair tight and sank back with a groan.

"What's the matter, Nora?" said Sir William.

"I feel faint," she said, with difficulty. "I shall be better soon."

She recovered quickly, and rising from her chair, said:

"Good-night, Sir William. I will retire, I shall be better in the morning."

She walked out of the room without shaking his hand.

Sir William looked after her, and then said to himself, "She's a puzzle. I can't make her out at all."

CHAPTER V.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

WE are all born with hearts, and hearts will beat. Some hearts are tender, some hard as flint. All hearts are occasionally touched. Jockey Jack's heart had not been rendered hard by the roughness of his early life. He had a warm, sympathetic nature, and his heart had learned to beat with remarkable rapidity of late.

He was in a constant flutter of excitement whenever he saw a certain neat figure in a charmingly simple costume flit about his master's premises. What was the matter with him? If any one had told Jack he was in love he would have laughed heartily, and scouted the idea.

Watch him now as he stands on a bucket turned upside down, leaning his bare arms, sleeves rolled up, on the lower half of the door of Blue Blood's box. What is he looking at with those earnest eyes? See in what direction they are cast.

A pretty girl is coming slowly across the stable-yard. She is of medium height, with her hair done up coquettishly, and her fair head crowned with a wide straw hat. A white cool dress, almost devoid of colouring. A dainty, winning, saucy miss. A

spoilt child. A favourite of fortune, and yet her kindly nature untouched with any taint of selfishness or selfwill. It is Hettie Dalton Jockey Jack is watching with such eager eyes.

She sees him, and smiling without the least embarrassment, says :

"Good morning, Jack, and how did Blue Blood behave himself this morning."

"Splendidly, Miss Dalton," said Jack, all in a flutter. "He's a real gem. Just have a look at him," and kicking away the bucket, he opened the door on which he had been leaning.

"What a splendid horse he is, Jack," said Hettie. "He should win a big race for Sir William."

"I hope he will," said Jack. "He's very busy now, Miss Dalton. I never saw a better doer."

Now "doer" may not have been a proper word for one of Madame Polishemoff's young ladies to know the precise meaning of, but Hettie understood it exactly. She had been bred in a horsey atmosphere, and although she never used slang, she knew the meaning of every stable phrase. So she had no occasion to ask Jack to translate literally into strict English what "a good doer" meant.

"He doesn't shame his stable," she said. "Do you know, Jack, he's my favourite? I used to like old Primrose, but his day has gone by, and he's an ancient pensioner now."

Jack was pleased. She liked Blue Blood, and he had charge of the horse. He made a mental note of the fact, and determined to give Blue Blood's shiny coat a little extra attention next morning.

Hettie looked at Jack for a few moments, and then said :

"You've changed, Jack, since my father brought you here. I'm so glad you stayed with him. He's a good man, isn't he ? "

"He is, Miss Dalton. I shall never be able to repay him for all he has done for me. And you were very kind to me, then," he added.

"And am I not now ? " she asked, archly.

"Yes, Miss Hettie, but then it's different now. We were children then," he said, wistfully.

"Naughty children, too, I'm afraid," she replied ; "at least I was."

"You could never be naughty," said Jack, so seriously that she laughed.

"I'm not so sure of that," she said ; "I feel very naughty now, sometimes."

Spying her father, she wished Jack good-day, and went away.

"She is pretty," sighed Jack. Then turning to Blue Blood, he patted that conceited gentleman's bright neck, and laid his cheek against it.

"You ought to be proud, old fellow," he said ; "she likes you better than any of 'em."

Hettie Dalton was idolized by her parents. It was an open question whether "Ned" or "Mag" spoiled her the more.

As the trio sat in the cosy parlour they looked very happy.

"How much Jack's improved, father," said Hettie ; "he has learnt rapidly what his teacher found time to instruct him in."

"He's a good lad," said Dalton ; "he's quiet and respectable, and knows his place, which is more than some of the young scamps do. Why, if half of 'em had had the leg up when I won the Moonee Valley Cup, like Jack did, they'd have been too big for any ordinary sized boots by this time. Sir William's taken a fancy to him. I'm glad of that, for he'll give him a good mount or two."

Hettie Dalton lay awake one night thinking. The moon shone through the blind and cast a pale shadow over her room. It was a lovely night ; warm and balmy, with a soft breeze blowing. She got up and opened the window to let in the fresh night air.

How peaceful all looked. She could not sleep. What disturbed her rest ? She hardly knew. Could it be the dawn of love ? No, for she had never seen a man, except her father, she cared a jot for. And yet Hettie felt that was hardly true.

She thought of that ragged little urchin crouching down in the cab. She saw his bright wistful eyes and his grateful look as she begged her father to take him home. Then she saw this lad clothed, well fed, and growing, not in bodily size, but in intellect and favour. Then she had gone to Madame's, and learned the ways of a fashionable young lady, and as she returned home every quarter she had noticed how this homeless waif had become a bright, handsome boy. And now he was twenty, and she was twenty. They were no longer children he had said. It was true. She felt she was no longer a child, but a woman with a woman's heart and a woman's passions. She was angry because she felt like this, and

had never made the discovery until now. It was absurd, of course. He would never think of such a thing. How could he. She was Hettie Dalton, and he—well he had no name. She didn't care for him a bit. But Hettie couldn't go to sleep, all the same. She was quite angry with him because she couldn't sleep. He had no business to unsettle and disturb her. Jockey Jack, indeed ! She knew what was due to her position. Her father's stable lad, and—and—and she could never—never—never—and, what's this ! Happy Hettie Dalton crying !

CHAPTER VI.

SHADY SOCIETY.

HECTOR FLUSHTON plays no unimportant part in the fortunes of Jockey Jack, so it may be as well to understand thoroughly the sort of man he is.

Sir William Melissa tolerated Flushton, but nothing more. With regard to Flushton's feelings towards Lady Melissa, they were complicated. He was not in love with her, but he admired her. It flattered his vanity that handsome Lady Melissa should show what he considered a preference for his society. He almost fancied she was half in love with him. Flushton's acquaintances knew he was a visitor at Sir William's house, and their respect for him increased accordingly.

How Flushton earned his living was a mystery. Some said he was a "remittance man," and received money regularly from England. Hector Flushton would probably have found it inconvenient to say how he earned his living. He always had money, not too much of it, but enough when he lost at racing, and he was prompt with his cash on settling day. He might have had to borrow the money to pay up with, but pay up he certainly did, and the book-makers trusted him, and admired him accordingly.

At this particular time Flushton seemed unusually flush of money. It was hinted, but never within his

hearing, that he had been the cause of the removal of Sir William Melissa's horses to Dalton's stables.

Hector Flushton as he walked down Collins Street some few weeks after the incidents lately recorded looked a well-dressed, fairly good-looking, and, to all outward appearances, a prosperous man.

It was about ten o'clock at night, and as he came to the Town Hall crossing, he stood a moment evidently thinking whether he should go home or stay out. It did not take him long to decide, for he turned round the corner into Swanson Street, and walked along until he came to Hurd's. He went inside, and called for "oysters," and before he had finished his supper a man entered the box in which he sat.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Flushton, is it," said the man, who looked like a jockey.

"Toddy Blake! Why, what on earth are you doing out at this time of night? I thought Ned Dalton looked after you fellows better than that," said Flushton.

It was Toddy Blake, and it will be remembered he was in Dalton's stable when Jockey Jack was first introduced there, and that he chaffed that worthy considerably about his appearance.

"Dalton's not got me quite as tight as that," said Blake. "You see I get a night off occasionally just to exercise my limbs a bit."

"Thought you'd enough of that and to spare," said Flushton. "Dalton works you pretty hard, I hear."

"He don't spare none of us," said Blake, "except it's Jockey Jack, and the governor humours that lad

awful. It's sickening to see it. Why, he let the lad go to school, and blest if he can't read and write now better than any of us."

"Jockey Jack's lucky," said Flushton. "I was there the night Dalton found him in the streets. He was a ragged little brat then, and no mistake. But he's a dashed good horseman, and reflects great credit on his master."

"Horseman be hanged!" said Blake. "I'll beat him any day, and let him pick his mount. Why, Bob Marlow told me the other day I could give a lad like Jockey Jack 7lb. any day and a beating."

"Marlow told you that, did he," thought Flushton. "Now, I wonder what Marlow's little game is." Aloud he said :

"You mustn't believe all Marlow tells you, although he's a good judge of what's what in riding a horse. Marlow's prejudiced against Dalton, don't you see, and that may have had something to do with it."

"I don't fancy it had," said Blake. "He said I could always reckon on a job in his stable when I got tired of my present place."

Hector Flushton felt that Bob Marlow must have some object in telling Toddy Blake all this. He mentally made a note of it, and resolved to find out what it was.

"Where are you going, Blake?" he said, as they went outside.

"Thought I'd have a run down to 'The Diamonds,'" said Blake. "I haven't been there for months. Guess Bella will fancy I've deserted her. She'll be on the look-out for another straight tip."

"If you are bent on going to that fashionable haunt of beauty I'll go with you," said Hector. "I've nothing particular to do, and it will kill time. Besides, I hear Bell's got a new beauty there."

"Then we'll go," said Blake, and calling a cab they gave the driver the name, and he evidently knew "The Diamonds" as well as he knew his horse's stable.

"Here we are," said Flushton, as he jumped out at a fine-looking house standing in somewhat spacious grounds.

Isabella Luscomb, or, as she was more familiarly known, "Bella," was the owner of "The Diamonds." She was a woman of, perhaps, forty, but it would be difficult to guess her exact age, for nature was much indebted to art.

She was, however, a fine woman, and a peculiarly fascinating woman. She was a member of the "shady society," but did not parade her vices flauntingly to the world at large. She had made a fortune. How it is not necessary to inquire. "The Diamonds" might have passed for a young ladies' seminary during the daytime, but at night the illusion might have been dispelled, for the inmates of Bella Luscomb's house kept up their revelries until small hours.

It happened to be a quiet night at "The Diamonds" when Flushton and Blake arrived there.

"You're quite a stranger, Hector," said Bella; "where have you been all this time? I've quite missed you. Let me introduce you to Miss St. George. I don't fancy you have met her before. Miss St. George, Mr. Hector Flushton, Mr. Blake."

Miss St. George was a very different woman to Bella Luscomb. She was not so old, and she did not paint, at least not visibly. Flushton said she did it so well he couldn't see it, but then he was a cynic.

She had fair hair, and a pretty, rather dollish, face, but the expression was listless and vacant. A sensuous mouth and eyes, and a voluptuous form. A woman with but little brain, not much education, and strong passions. She was a permanent resident at "The Diamonds," and was, therefore, not over particular.

Toddy Blake was looking at Miss St. George with eyes expressive of admiration, and seeing this she went over to him, and the pair were speedily and earnestly conversing.

Hector Flushton watched them with a curious smile as he lounged in the chair she had vacated.

"That's a case of spoons," he said quietly to Bella.

"Madge isn't much of a spoon, Hector. I can't make her out. She's awfully vain and awfully fond of money."

"She's a woman, which accounts for both," said Flushton.

"Seriously, though how do you like Madge?" she asked.

"That's the divinity's name, is it?" he said; "Madge St. George. Swell, isn't it? Don't care for her much at present, but fancy I could like her a little bit if I tried very hard."

"You're a hard-hearted, selfish wretch," said Bella; "I wish I'd never seen you."

"Are you very much in love with me, Bell?" he asked, mockingly.

She did not answer. The fact was she liked Hector Flushton as well as she ever could like any man. She liked him all the more because he treated her so disdainfully.

"So Blue Blood's the best horse in Dalton's stable, is he?" said Madge St. George.

"Don't you take Blake's word for that," said Hector; "he's a deceitful brute."

"Blue Blood or Blake?" asked Miss St. George.

"The horse, in this case," said Flushton. "He's been heavily backed by Sir William on more than one occasion, and has put him in the hole each time."

"Blue Blood belongs to Sir William—what Sir William?" she asked.

"Sir William Melissa," said Flushton.

Miss St. George started, and he saw it.

"Do you know him?" she asked.

"Intimately," said Flushton.

"Here, look here," said Blake, who was somewhat top-heavy with champagne, "Miss St. George is my pal. You're not going to have all the talk with her, is he, Madge?"

"Certainly not," she said; "what makes you fancy Blue Blood?"

"'Cause I see him do his work with that fellow, Jockey Jack, in the saddle, and I know he can clear all our lot out, and we've got some fast 'uns."

"Hold your tongue, Toddy," said Hector, "or you'll get into trouble."

"Mind your own business," said Miss St. George.

"It's my business," said Flushton. "I'm a friend of Sir William's, and I don't care about Blake making an ass of himself."

"I presume you mean he's an ass to talk to me?" said Miss St. George, angrily.

"In the present case, yes," he replied, and then ducked his head to avoid the champagne glass she threw at him.

"Take that, you cad!" she said.

"Madge, stop it," said Bella. "If you can't behave in my house, I'll put you outside for the night."

"Much I'd care if you did," she said.

"You'll not do it while I'm here," said Blake.

Hector saw a row brewing, so he said :

"I beg your pardon, Miss St. George. You nettled me a little. I have no doubt you will be discreet, whatever Blake tells you."

She was mollified, and said she would overlook it this time.

"Of course you know Lady Melissa if you know Sir William?" said Miss St. George, after a brief interval.

"Yes, I know her. I knew her before she married Sir William."

"So did I," was the utterly unexpected reply.

Hector Flushton stared at her in amazement, and said :

"You knew Lady Melissa before she was married?"

"Oh dear, yes. She's an old friend of mine," laughed Miss St. George.

CHAPTER VII.

BLUE BLOOD'S OWNER.

To say that Sir William Melissa was puzzled at his wife's behaviour is to put the matter too mildly. He was more than puzzled, he was seriously annoyed. He could not make her out. The only solution he could arrive at was that she never loved him, and had merely married him for the position he could give her, and was growing tired of her bondage.

He could not banish the idea from his mind that Jockey Jack had resembled his wife. He could not bear the idea that Lady Melissa should have her features reproduced in a jockey-boy. He vowed he would have a good look at Jockey Jack next time he saw him, and no doubt he would discover his error. What a fool he was to let this mere trifle annoy him.

Lady Melissa had evidently not forgotten Sir William's remark, although she made no allusion to it.

She seemed ill, and complained of feeling depressed, but when her husband suggested a change would do her good, she said she preferred to remain at home. She was unsettled, and appeared anxious. Sir William, as he drove over to Hairbell Cottage,

ruminated on what he was pleased to term his "confounded stupidity."

When he arrived there a chat with genial Ned Dalton soon drove gloomy fancies out of his head, and when he heard of Blue Blood's progress, he became much interested in that animal's welfare.

"He's a clinker, Sir William," said Dalton. "I never was so sweet on a horse in my life. He gallops in great style, and I don't mind telling you, I think he can clear our lot out. I haven't tried him yet. It's too soon, and those blessed touts get hold of everything."

"What had I better enter him for?" said Sir William.

"We must have him in the Newmarket for a certainty," said Dalton. "He's desperate fast, but I don't fancy he can stay. If he can't show me a trial good enough to win in 'fourteen' I shall be disappointed."

"Fourteen!" said Sir William. "Why that will beat Cranbrook's time."

"It will," said Dalton, "and I feel sure he can do it."

"Then we'll enter him for the Newmarket," said Sir William; "I suppose it's no good putting him in the Australian Cup?"

"Not much," said Dalton, "still he may as well be entered for both. Lochiel, a son of Prince Charlie, could stay, and very nearly pulled off the double."

"Then he shall be entered for both," said Sir William; "what weight will he get?"

"They'll put him at about 7 stone 10 pound in the

Newmarket," said Dalton. "But anything under 8 stone will satisfy me."

"They always weight my horses pretty heavily," said Sir William.

"Not too heavy," said Dalton; "you've had some pretty good cattle in your time."

"I believe Marlow's got a real good one in reserve for the Newmarket," said Sir William.

"I've heard so," said Dalton. "I fancy it's St. Almo, and a real good bred one he is. He'll have to be a clipper to beat Blue Blood."

"I wish I'd bought St. Almo when I had the chance," said Sir William; "it would have been just as well to have had him in the stable. Can he be bought now, do you think?"

"That all depends," said Dalton. "If he can win a Newmarket Marlow won't sell, and I believe he owns the horse, although he runs in Flushton's name."

"I'll ask Flushton about him next time I see him," said Sir William.

"I wouldn't mention it if I were you, Sir William," said Dalton; "that man's hand in glove with Marlow, and I don't like the fellow."

"No more do I," said Sir William; "I don't fancy there's much harm in him, though. You're lucky, Dalton, to have a good lot of men about you."

"Yes, I am. Sharpe's a good fellow, but I have my doubts about Blake. He's a decent chap, but a bit flash, and I'm afraid he lets his tongue wag when he's flush. Take 'em all round they're a good lot."

"Jockey Jack seems to be a favourite of yours," said Sir William.

"He is. I never took so to a lad before. Do you know, Sir William, there's a good breed in that fellow. He's so different from the ordinary run of lads we get about our stables. He never swears like the other fellows. He's actually fond of reading, and he don't drink nor smoke. But he's no molly coddle. That lad has pluck in him, and they'll find it out when it comes to a brilliant dash for the rails. He rides splendidly. I think, Sir William, he'll be the best horseman we have with a little more time. He's a good-looking chap, too, and, take him all round, I'd not part with him for the best man among 'em."

"You are enthusiastic, Dalton," said Sir William. "I must have a chat with Jack, I've taken a fancy to him myself."

"There he is; I'll call him in," said Dalton.

Jockey Jack, obedient to Dalton's shout, came into the room, and Sir William regarded him keenly.

"I've made no mistake," he thought. "How confoundedly like Nora he is."

"I'm glad your master gives you a good character," said Sir William. "Hope you're ready to ride Blue Blood to victory when the time comes."

"It won't be my fault if he doesn't win, Sir William, and I don't think it will be his fault," he said.

"You're to ride him in the Newmarket Handicap, if all goes on well," said Sir William. "What chance

do you think he'd have with something under 8 stone?"

"Mr. Dalton could tell you that much better than I can," said Jack, deferentially.

"I know what Dalton thinks," said Sir William. "I want your opinion."

"For what it's worth, and that's not much," said Jack, "you are welcome to it. Over six furlongs, I don't think there's a horse in training at Flemington could touch him."

"Bravo," said Sir William. "Then you stand a good chance of a victory, for Blue Blood will not get over 8 stone, I think."

"I can ride him if he only got seven," said Jack.

"You're a light-weight then," said Sir William.

"It's not much trouble to me, either," said Jack. "I never have to sweat much. It's natural with me."

"Did you ever know your parents, Jack?" said Sir William, suddenly changing the subject.

"I have only a very dim recollection of my mother," said Jack sorrowfully. "My father I never knew. I could not describe her either, her memory is very faint. I have some idea of being left with an elderly woman, and never seeing my mother again. I was not very well treated. I've no doubt I was a bad lot; but I cleared out and took to the streets. I must have been about six years old then. It's a good job I did, or else Mr. Dalton would never have found me. I don't ever expect to know who my parents were. I must make my own name, as I have none by right. It's hard to have no parents and no

name. It pulls a man back in the race of life. A fellow with no pedigree can't be expected to fetch much."

"Perhaps you may come across your mother some day," said Sir William. "Perhaps she lost you, and tried every means to find you. Maternal instinct is strong, and she might recognize you again. You'd be a credit to her, Jack, whoever she is," he said, kindly.

Jack smiled sadly, and as he did so Sir William mentally ejaculated "her smile, too! Hang it, how idiotic I am. If I give way to these fancies, I shall be quite morose."

"I'm afraid, Sir William, if she found me out she would not care to recognize me. She might be a grand lady. Sometimes I have dreams, and she figures in them as a beautiful, well-bred woman," said Jack.

"Let's hope they 'll be realized some day," said Sir William, heartily. "Here's something for you, Jack. It'll buy you a new racing saddle for Blue Blood," and he gave him a ten-pound note.

"Thank you, Sir William. I'll buy the best saddle I can get, for the horse is worthy of it. You're too kind, sir."

"Not at all, young 'un. I've more cash than I can conveniently spend. You deserve it, and go on as you have commenced is all I can say to you."

"Where's Blake been?" said Dalton, after Sir William had gone. "I let him go out yesterday, and I fancy he made a night of it."

"I don't know where he's been," said Jack.

"Didn't he come in this morning about the time we were going out to the track?" asked Dalton.

Jockey Jack was a truthful lad, but he didn't want to "peach on a pal," so he hesitated. He had seen Toddy Blake looking only half sober come strolling into the stables as the horses were being readied for their morning's work. Blake had not said where he had been, but Jack could tell Dalton was not far off the mark when he said he'd been making a night of it.

Dalton saw Jack hesitate, and he knew what it meant. He liked him all the more for it.

"Never mind telling me, Jack. I'll ask Blake myself. Send him in here when you go out."

Toddy Blake came slouching in, cap in hand. He looked uncommonly red about the eyes and pale in the face.

"Ain't you well, Blake?" asked Dalton.

"I'm all right, sir," said Blake, huskily.

"You're not, Toddy," said Dalton. "You've been drinking, and you've been out all night."

"Who told you?" snorted Blake, as he looked at the door as much as to say, "I suppose Jockey Jack's been peaching."

"You needn't fancy Jack told me," said Dalton, interpreting the glance, "because he's too much of a man to split. I asked him, and he didn't answer me, if that's any consolation to you."

"Oh," said Blake, evidently only half convinced.

"I think I've told you before I'll not have this stopping out at nights. You're no good next day, and besides, it shakes your nerves, and my lads must all have good nerves. Come, where have you been?"

"Had a bit of a spree," said Toddy, "that's all. Wish I hadn't now, I feel deuced bad."

"Serves you right," said Dalton. "I hope you didn't chatter about the horses when you were sprung. If ever I find you or any other fellow in my employ telling tales out of school I'll bundle you out neck and crop. You needn't tell me where you were if you're asnamed. Now go, and remember what I've told you."

Toddy Blake got out of the room as quickly as possible.

He went to his bed and "camped," as he called it. He'd an awful headache, and was not in the sweetest of tempers.

"It's no business of his where I was," he muttered to himself. "Not likely I'd tell him I was at 'The Diamonds.' Crikey, what a row there'd be if he knew I went there with Flushton. He'd be fit to kick me out. Well, Marlow said he'd give me a good place, and lots of riding. But he's not Ned Dalton after all.

"Wonder if I said much about Blue Blood. Couldn't have done. That fellow Flushton's a deuce of a pumper, he'll have it all out of me if he can. Fancy that beauty Madge saying she knew Lady Melissa. All brag, I'll bet. Her know Lady Melissa. Bosh! Lady Melissa's worth a million of her. Lady Melissa's a fine woman. So's St. George, but then she's a bit off. She's not thoroughbred, and the other one is, if looks go for any thing. They said her ladyship was a barmaid. Don't care what she was, she's a beauty. Hallø,

Jack, what do you want," he said, as Jockey Jack entered the room.

"Did the governor give you a dressing down?" asked Jack.

"Didn't he just," said Blake. "You didn't tell him I was late in, eh?"

"No," said Jack. "I wouldn't do that."

"He said you didn't, but I thought I'd ask you," said Blake. "You're not such a bad sort after all."

Jack laughed, and said :

"I wish you'd stop drinking, Blake, it makes you unsteady in the saddle."

"Rot," said Blake, but he knew it was true.

"I'll pull up a bit," he continued. "Had a rare spree last night, Jack."

"Had you?" said Jack.

"You bet. Down at 'The Diamonds.' Such jolly girls. You must come some night."

"No thanks, Blake. I'm not a ladies' man."

"Well I am," said Blake, with a self-satisfied air.

"Glad we've one in the stable," said Jack.

"You're a bit shy, Jockey, my lad. Now, I'll bet my racing saddle to your dirty old hat that Miss Hettie can twist you round her little finger. I've watched you," said Blake, with a nod.

Jack blushed furiously, and seemed confused.

"Don't talk rubbish, Blake," he said. "Miss Dalton is our master's daughter. Besides, I'm nobody. I haven't even a name. Don't be a fool, Toddy."

"It's you're the fool," said Blake. "If a girl made eyes at me like Miss Hettie does at you, why, d——

it, I'd have a shy at her, Dalton or no Dalton. Go in and win, man."

The window was wide open, and a beautiful girl in a white dress as she approached had heard voices. She halted mechanically, and heard Jack's voice saying :

"I don't care a bit for her. She's not my sort. Miss Dalton's a cut above us chaps."

"Why, Hettie, what's the matter with you?" said her mother, as she came into the house. "You've been crying."

"No I haven't, mother dear. I've got a slight headache. I'll go and lie down."

She went upstairs, locked the door, and then threw herself on the bed, sobbing, and in a choking voice saying :

"He said I don't care a bit for her. She's not my sort."

Jockey Jack said to himself as he left Blake, "What an infernal lie I told him. I had to do it. 'Don't care for her a bit. She's not my sort.' Perhaps it would be all the better for me if I didn't care a bit, but I'm afraid Miss Hettie's just my sort."

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING WRONG WITH HETTIE.

"NED, I can't make it out, there's something wrong with our Hettie," said Mrs. Dalton to her husband. "She's not the same girl she was a month ago. Her spirits are gone, and she mopes a good deal. She must want change of air?"

"There's nothing seriously amiss with her, is there?" said Dalton, alarmed.

"No; nothing serious. I don't think she's ill," said Mrs. Dalton. "It's something on her mind, I fancy, but what it can be at her age Lord only knows. She's a mere child yet, only just out of boarding-school."

"She's more than that, Mag," said Dalton. "Hettie's a woman now, with a woman's feeling. Not got a sweetheart, has she?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Ned. Who could she have for a sweetheart and I not know it," said Mrs. Dalton.

"Have you asked her?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dalton, "but she puzzles me. I think you'd better speak to her, Ned."

"Very well," he replied, "here she comes. You leave the room, Mag, and I'll have a chat with her."

"Good morning, father," she said.

"You don't look very well, Hettie, this morning," he said; "what's the matter?"

"I'm all right, father," she said. "I've had head-

aches rather frequently, and they are not very lively companions."

"Are you sure it's the head and not the heart," said Dalton, going straight to the mark.

Hettie started, and blushed rosy red. He saw it, and thought "it is a heart case after all."

"What do you mean, dad?" she asked.

"Not worrying about a sweetheart, are you, Hettie?" he said, kindly "Come, tell your father all about it, and we'll soon set matters right."

"Don't talk like that father, I have no sweetheart. I never saw any one I cared for but you and mother, and I don't want anybody else," she said, with a little sob.

"Come here, Hettie," he said, and the girl came and sat on his knee, and he fondly stroked her hair. "If it's a secret, my girl, keep it, your father can trust you, but it would be easier for you if you told me what ailed you."

Hettie buried her face on his shoulder and had a hearty cry. It did her good, and she felt relieved, as she said:

"You must not trouble about me, father. It really is nothing. I'm quite well, and you are altogether mistaken in what you think. I'm too young to think about sweethearts yet, mother says."

"Oh, your mother says that, does she, Hettie. Well, your father doesn't, and if you find a good honest respectable lover after your own heart, I shall not object, be very sure of that."

"You dear good old dad," she replied, as she kissed him. "I will remember what you say some day. Mind you keep your promise."

"I will," he said. "Why, you're better now, Hettie. I begin to think you're not much touched after all."

Hettie thought a good deal over what her father had said. She must brighten up. It would never do for her to pine for a love she never could receive in return for her own.

Ever since she had heard Jockey Jack utter those careless words to Blake, Hettie had felt something wanting in her daily life. She fought hard to crush her feelings, but they would not be crushed. She knew she was weak and foolish to fret over something she could never attain, but it was hard to put it altogether aside. She did not know what her feelings were towards Jack until she heard him say she was not "his sort." Her heart stood still as she heard him speak, and then she realized for the first time that he was more to her than she had thought. She knew her father and mother would expect her to look higher than a mere stable lad. She was indignant herself for feeling so strongly about a nameless waif picked up by her father in the street. Hettie was, however, just, and she acknowledged that "the waif" had always behaved very well, and was considerably more of a gentleman than some married men who spoke to her father with such a patronizing air.

She had avoided Jack as much as possible ever since that day, and she saw he wondered why she did so.

"He ought to know," she thought. "His own sense ought to tell him. Even if he does not know I heard him say those cruel words, he said them, and I suppose he meant them."

Jockey Jack was decidedly out of spirits. For his part he could not make out why Hettie studiously

avoided him. That she did so he felt certain. Had he offended her. If so, how? He could not think of any way in which he had incurred her displeasure. He had been careful to restrain himself when in her presence, and had always behaved in a most respectful manner. She could never have guessed what his feelings were towards her.

Jack was straightforward, and, as he had no idea of the real cause of Hettie's coolness, he thought he would ask her why she avoided him on the first favourable opportunity.

He had not to wait long for this.

The day after her father had spoken to her Hettie was left alone at the cottage, her father and mother having driven into the city.

She was sitting in the garden, which is only divided by a hedge row from the paddock and loose-boxes.

Jack saw her, and went across the paddock to the hedge. He wondered why he did so, for he felt that after all, he had, perhaps, no right to question her. She was at perfect liberty to avoid him if she thought fit.

He called gently over the hedge :

"Miss Dalton."

Hettie started, and, when she saw who it was, blushed violently, and felt very uncomfortable. She merely answered :

"Well?"

"I wished to speak to you a few moments, Miss Dalton," he stammered.

"What about?" said Hettie.

Another repulse. The tone implied "you cannot possibly have to tell me anything I care to know"

Jack floundered, and the result of his next speech being that he fancied "Blue Blood was a bit off, and that he'd been anxious about him."

Hettie looked at him with a stony gaze.

"I should have thought my father would have been the proper person for you to speak to about Blue Blood," said Hettie. "I don't see how it concerns me, or why you should have come here to tell me at all."

"I didn't come to tell you that," blurted out Jack. "I came because I fancied you avoided me of late, and I thought I must have done something to offend you. If I have, Miss Dalton, I'm very sorry."

Hettie's heart went "pit-a-pat," but she kept her nerves steady.

"I'm not offended," she replied. "If it is any consolation you may know at once that you have never given me cause to take offence."

She said it in a cold, formal tone, very unlike the Hettie of a month ago.

"I'm glad of that," said Jack. "I'd do anything for you, Miss Dalton, or your father or mother. You've all been so kind to me. I never knew what kindness was until I came here. It hurts me, Miss Hettie, to think you should be angry with me. I know I'm a poor, nameless creature, but I've got a heart and feelings the same as other people, and I'd die for you, indeed I would, Miss Hettie."

"Poor Jack," thought Hettie, but she recollected those fatal words.

"We have been no kinder than you deserved," she replied. "My father is very pleased with all your work. He says you are the best rider of the whole lot."

She felt she must give him a little comfort.

Jack's face brightened visibly, but he would rather Hettie would have spoken of herself.

"I'm glad he speaks well of me," he said, and was about to go away when he stopped, and, looking at Hettie, asked :

"Why do you never speak to me now, Miss Dalton?"

"Because——," she commenced, sharply, and then stopped. She had no occasion to give any reason for her conduct. She saw she had made a mistake, and had half admitted she had reasons for not speaking.

"Because what?" said Jack.

"Nothing," said Hettie. "I did not know I had not spoken to you lately."

"There is something," said Jack. "Please tell me what it is. I have a right to know if it concerns myself."

"You have no right to speak to me like that," said Hettie. "But if you must know, I don't care to have my name bandied about by my father's stable hands."

It was out now. He deserved it for what he had said.

Jack could not understand her accusation, for such it seemed to him. He replied :

"Surely you cannot be serious, Miss Dalton. Your name is never mentioned, except with respect, and also, perhaps, admiration."

"When a man alludes to me as 'not his sort,' I don't call that very respectful," said Hettie, bristling up.

Jack was staggered. His conversation with Blake

had entirely escaped his memory. He did not recollect it now.

"If anyone said that," retorted Jack, "he ought to be horsewhipped."

Hettie looked surprised. Was Jack deceitful, or had he forgotten what he had said? She gave him the benefit of the doubt, and replied:

"I am glad you think so. I can assure you those words were used."

"Then I am not surprised at your keeping away from the stables," said Jack; "I hope you don't mean to let me fall under your displeasure from the fault of another?"

This was going a little too far, Hettie thought; so she rose from her seat, and, as she went away, fired the parting shot in the following words:

"I do not blame you for the fault of another: I blame you for your own fault. I hardly expected you to use such words about me. I overheard what you said, quite by accident, and I do not know who you said them to. All I do know is I am positive you used the expression I have mentioned. Good morning!"

Jack felt inclined to jump the fence, rush after Hettie, and go down on his knees and swear he never made use of any such words. He was angry with her. It was not like her, it was unjust. He saw Blake crossing the paddock, and all at once the conversation he had with him flashed across his memory. He saw it all now. Hettie must have overheard his talk with Toddy. "I don't care a bit for her. She's not my sort." He recollected the

words perfectly. What must she have thought of him? What a self-conceited prig he must have seemed in her eyes. As if it mattered whether he cared a bit about her or not. "Not her sort," indeed. He had meant to silence Blake with this rejoinder. He did not mean what he said. He knew he would give years of his life for a few months of happiness with Hettie. And now he had grossly offended her. She would never forgive him, or if she did she would never believe he had not meant what he said. He had aggravated the offence by expressing ignorance of it to her. She would think he was untruthful as well as impudent. Poor Jack, he felt sore at heart as he walked back to the stables. A cloud seemed to have come over his life, which, since he had been at Hairbell Cottage, had been remarkably happy. A gleam of light suddenly rent the cloud. If Hettie had taken such offence at his words, perhaps she cared for him more than she would admit. If he only knew! He could easily explain matters then. He must wait and seize another opportunity to speak to her.

Hettie felt relieved after her interview with Jack. He was evidently in earnest when he spoke to her. Had he really meant what he had said? He could not have attached much weight to the words, or he would have remembered them. She could not help noticing the longing look in his eyes as he spoke to her, and also the sadness in his tone. Then she recollected the words "Miss Dalton's a cut above our sort," and fancied they qualified the previous sentences somewhat.

CHAPTER IX.

MADGE ST. GEORGE.

HECTOR FLUSHTON, calling at "The Diamonds" one day, luckily found Miss St. George in sole possession. This was his opportunity, and he meant to have it out with her about Lady Melissa.

Hector Flushton was fond of Lady Melissa, and he fancied she was not disinclined to encourage him. If he could only get hold of something that would place her more in his power, he felt she would quickly succumb to his fascinations.

"How well you look to-day, Madge," he said; "you always dress well, but that gown is perfection."

"I'm glad you like it," she replied; "I thought it was rather pretty myself, but Bella says it's horrid."

As a matter of fact, Bella had not said any such thing, but Miss St. George was not particular what she said.

"Hang Bella," said Hector, "you needn't be alarmed at what she says. She's jealous. Bella can't hold a candle to you."

"So you say now. I expect you'd say the same thing to her if I were absent," she said.

"Nonsense, Madge. There are very few people I like better than you."

"Then there are some?" she asked, petulantly.

"Well, you see I have known you so short a time,"

he said ; "and one cannot drop old acquaintances all at once."

"Of course not," she said ; "more especially when they are in good society."

"Exactly so," he answered. "There's Lady Melissa, for instance. She's an adorable woman. As cold as ice, but a model wife."

Miss St. George laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh. There was a vindictive sound about it told Flushton he had struck a jarring note, and he meant to play upon it.

"You may laugh," he went on : "but I can assure you, Lady Melissa is all I say she is. Some women can never believe there is any good in others of their sex."

"Indeed," she said, "and pray, who told you that ? Lady Melissa, I presume ?"

"She did," he answered with a ready lie.

"Who is she, to talk about our sex, I should like to know ? She's no better than the rest of us. Lady Melissa, indeed. I wish you knew her as well as I do, you'd change your tune then, Hector Flushton."

"It would take a good deal more than you could tell me to destroy my faith in Lady Melissa," he replied.

"Lady Melissa is no better than I am, or she was not, at any rate," said Madge.

"Madge, you don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh yes, I do," she replied ; "I repeat Lady Melissa is no better than I am."

"Why ?" he asked.

"That's my affair," she said ; "I'm not bound to tell you my reasons for what I say, am I ?"

"Certainly not," he said ; "but when you make

accusations against a person you should always be in a position to prove them."

"So I am," she answered, defiantly. "What is Lady Melissa to you?"

The question was so direct he could not answer it for a moment, and then he replied :

"Lady Melissa is my friend, and I have also her husband's friendship. That is all she is to me. If I thought she was what you hint at, Madge, I'd never speak to her again," he said.

"You would not?" she said, eagerly.

"I would not," he replied. "When a woman can act the modest pure wife as she must do, if what you say is correct, then I say she is not the sort I care about."

Miss St. George was very fond of Hector Flushton, and she was jealous of Lady Melissa, for he had been careful to drop hints as to how often he was with her, and how he enjoyed her society.

"Then you are not very fond of her," said Miss St. George.

"Yes, I am," he said, "that's why I don't believe what you say."

"Suppose I tell you what I know about Lady Melissa," she said.

"You can if you like. Please yourself," he said, with an air of indifference.

"And suppose I do like," she said ; "what then, Hector?"

"Why, then I can judge for myself," he replied, "and if what you say turns out to be true I'll cut her acquaintance."

Miss St. George's tale seemed to surprise Hector Flushton exceedingly. He was amazed at what he

heard. She spoke rapidly and had evidently a retentive memory. Her story was a long one, and Flushton became more and more interested as it went on. When she had finished, Hector Flushton looked at her lost in bewilderment. Could he believe such a tale? Had Miss St. George concocted it to lead him astray? She must be a clever woman if she had done so.

"Have you any proof of what you say?" he asked at length. "It is a most extraordinary story and highly incredible. I can hardly believe it."

"You can please yourself. It's true, every word of it. My mother was the woman looked after her."

"The devil she did," he said. "Then probably your mother can tell me more about it."

"She is dead," said Miss St. George, "and a good thing, too. It would have broken her heart to see me as I am."

"Then she must have left you all her belongings," said Hector Flushton.

"She did. A few hundred pounds and some jewellery, and other things. She trusted me, poor soul. If she'd known me as I am I should never have received anything and she would have cursed me before she died. She was kind to those who needed help, and that is why my Lady Melissa that is came to know her."

"Have you any papers to prove what you say?" he asked.

"Yes; she gave them my mother to keep safe, as she did not wish to carry them about with her. They might have disgraced her."

"So they might," he said. "So they would now," he thought. "I must have those papers. Will you let me see them, Madge," he asked.

"What for?" she said, rather alarmed. "I don't want to injure her. She was kind to mother, and I could not do that, bad as I am."

"Of course I don't. I only want to look at them to satisfy myself they are genuine. What possible harm could I do her while they remain in your possession?" he said.

"Then I will show you them," and Madge left the room.

"Here's a nice mess," he said to himself. "I must get hold of that precious document somehow. Not to-day, it would be too risky. By Jove, there's money in it if I get hard up. I don't like to do such shabby things, but there may come a day when I shall have no choice. At present it will be sufficient if I use these papers to make her proud ladyship look upon me with a more favourable eye. Who'd have thought it to have looked at her? and yet she always appears to me a woman with a secret behind her mask."

Miss St. George entered carrying a small tin box. She unlocked it and carefully took out the small papers it contained. Hector Flushton eagerly scanned the contents.

"That's it," she said, taking up two blue official looking papers fastened together.

Flushton read them carefully, and put them down as though he was loath to let them go out of his hands.

"They're correct," he replied; "there can be no

doubt as to the truth of your story. It's most remarkable. Have you anything else of Lady Melissa's?"

"No," she replied. "That's all, but it is quite sufficient to induce you to believe what I say."

When he had gone Miss St. George went to her room and took the box with her. She unlocked a chest of formidable dimensions, and then took out another paper.

"I didn't mean to show him that," she said. "He knows quite enough now. It would be still worse for her if he knew this. What harm has she done me that I should have told him? But he promised not to injure her, and I think he'll keep his word. He'll not see much of her now, that's all I wanted. I mean to keep Hector for myself if I can. Let her dare take him away. I'll show her what I can do then."

She took out a locket and chain with a portrait in the former, which she looked at for a few moments. Then she opened a birthday text book, and saw the name inside on the fly-leaf. She put them carefully in the small tin box, and locked the lot up in the chest.

Hector Flushton went away from "The Diamonds" elated. He had Lady Melissa in his power now. He would put on the screw gently at first. If she declined his advances he must use his power. As for Miss St. George, she was merely a tool in his hands.

Jockey Jack little knew how his future life was to be affected by Miss St. George's story told to Hector Flushton.

CHAPTER X.

NED DALTON GOES IN FOR DIPLOMACY.

THE master of Hairbell Cottage was a bit of a diplomatist in his way. If he fancied he could gain legitimate information by appearing to be friendly with a person he cordially detested he would not hesitate how to act for a moment.

If there was one man he cordially disliked it was Hector Flushton. And yet he seriously contemplated asking Hector Flushton in a casual way to come down to Hairbell Cottage, have dinner and a quiet chat, and actually look at the horses. Ned was almost surprised at himself when he had firmly fixed this idea in his mind.

"I don't like it," he thought; "but it's diplomatic. He's in the opposition ranks, and I must get at him. He'll tell me lies at first I have no doubt, but I shall be the better able to discern the truth when it does come out. I'll get it out of him if I have to squeeze him as dry as a squashed lemon."

What could have made Dalton desirous of getting Flushton into his house?

Nothing more nor less than the report of a gallop at Caulfield.

Marlow, formerly trainer to Sir William Melissa, had removed to Caulfield, and Ned Dalton had heard on what he considered indisputable authority that

St. Almo, the Marlow's stables Newmarket horse, had done a trial good enough to do it in "fourteen." He knew the horses running in the trial, and he felt almost sure of the time, but he wanted to be quite sure what weight St. Almo had up.

Hector Flushton was Marlow's right hand man. He did all the stable commissions, and was thoroughly "in the know." If Dalton could get out of Hector Flushton the exact truth of that Caulfield gallop he knew he should hold the key to the Newmarket in his hands—at least he fancied so, and he seldom made mistakes.

Ned Dalton knew more about the doings of the men in his employ than they gave him credit for.

He knew Toddy Blake was on speaking terms with Hector Flushton, and, therefore, Toddy was the man to lure the fish to the Hairbell Cottage net.

Dalton meant to give his fish plenty of line. It was already a fortnight after St. Almo's gallop, and consequently Flushton would never connect his visit with that affair.

When Ned Dalton coolly told his wife that he intended to ask Mr. Hector Flushton to dinner at Hairbell Cottage she almost fell off her chair, and ejaculated in extreme surprise :

"Ned, you're mad."

"No, I'm not, Mag. I'm particularly sane," he replied.

"Why, father, you said Mr. Flushton was a man you detested, and that only a week or two ago," said Hettie.

"Well, I've changed my opinion," he replied.

"Mr. Flushton at present is a very estimable young man."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Dalton. "Pray, when did you discover that, Ned?"

"About an hour after I heard of St. Almo's trial at Caulfield," he said.

"What ever had that to do with it, father?" said Hettie.

"Diplomatically, a great deal," he said.

"Much you know about diplomatics," said Mrs. Dalton. "Ned, you're a fool."

Hettie laughed as she said:

"Let him alone, mother. I've no doubt he has a good reason for what he is doing. Besides, I'd like to see Mr. Hector Flushton, I've heard so much about him. They say he's very good-looking."

"Hettie," said Mrs. Dalton in a voice that made them both start. "Hettie, you ought to know better. Good looks, indeed. Well, I wonder what next."

"Well, mother, there's no particular harm in being good-looking, is there?" said Hettie.

"You're only a child yet, Hettie. Time enough for you to know when a man's good-looking in another five years."

"You found out my good looks before that age," said Dalton, shyly, and Hettie joined in the laugh against her mother.

"Your good looks! You never had any, Ned. I married you for pity's sake. I believe it saved your life," said Mrs. Dalton.

"I believe it saved two lives," he replied, and Mrs. Dalton whisked out of the room saying he could ask

who he liked, but he must cook the dinner himself. Ned Dalton knew his wife well, and, therefore, had no misgivings on the score of the dinner. In fact he generally found when he "had to cook the dinner himself," there was generally a more lavish display than usual.

"Blake, come here," said Dalton, as Toddy went along under the weight of a bucket of water. He put it down and came across the yard.

"Toddy, I believe you know Mr. Hector Flush-ton," said Dalton.

Blake looked fit to drop into the earth, and thought, "What a man he is! How on earth did he know it?" He replied :

"I'm slightly acquainted with him."

"I want you to get better acquainted," said Dalton.

Blake could not believe his ears. Had Dalton gone mad ?

"I want you to tell him in a casual sort of way that I want to see him. Tell him I'd like him to have a look at the stables, and so on. Tell him what you like, only get him here. I like the man," said Dalton.

Blake was knocked fairly out of time. He said afterwards in confidence to Jack that "Dalton had gone clean off it."

"I'll do my best, sir," said Blake. "I may see him to-night if I go down town."

Here was a chance to get out for the night and have a run over to "The Diamonds" and see Madge St. George.

"Very well. Go to-night," said Dalton, "and mind you're back in decent time."

"When is he to come?" said Blake.

"Any day that suits him," said Dalton, "but tell him he'd better come in the morning."

"I will do what you want," said Blake. "Thought it best to humour the governor," he said to Jack; "he's clean off it. I'd say he'd been drinking, only he looked so awfully sober."

He talked the matter over with Jack, who said it was no business of theirs, and Mr. Dalton could ask who he liked to his house.

"That's all right," said Blake, "but if he knew Flushton's character as well as I do he'd be chary how he introduced him to his daughter. He's a devil for the women is Hector, and not half a bad-looking fellow. I'll bet he's clean gone on Miss Hettie the first time he sees her."

"Nonsense," said Jack. "Besides, if Miss Dalton chooses to encourage him, that's her business. She's quite a match for Flushton."

Blake was not long before he saw Flushton, who was greatly surprised at Dalton's message. "I always fancied he didn't like me over much," he thought. "What game can he have on now? Well, I'll chance it, whatever it is; I'd like to have a look at his horses, for I hear Blue Blood has improved wonderfully."

He made arrangements, and, punctually to time, proceeded to Hairbell Cottage.

Dalton gave him a hearty welcome, at the same time inwardly fretting and fuming that he had to do so.

"I'm glad to come, Dalton," said Hector. "In

fact, nothing will give me greater pleasure than to have a chat with you and a glance round the stables."

"Suppose we reverse the order," said Dalton. "Have a look round the stables first, and a chat afterwards."

Hector Flushton had never been through Dalton's stables, and he knew very few strangers were granted that privilege, therefore he felt all the more inclined to be friendly with the trainer.

He scanned Blue Blood narrowly, and was fain to admit the horse looked in much better trim than when Marlow had him. He was much impressed with the cleanliness and order prevailing throughout the establishment.

At dinner he was introduced to Mrs. Dalton and Hettie, and, strange to say, he created a favourable impression upon the former.

Flushton admired Hettie very much. He had no idea she was such a charming girl, and he vowed he would be better acquainted with her if possible.

"I might do a good deal worse," he thought. "She's pretty, looks good-tempered, and Ned Dalton must have saved a pretty fair pile by this time. I must make an impression on Miss Hettie Dalton; it may come in useful."

The ladies left Dalton and his visitor to chat and smoke over their wine.

Dalton hardly knew how to broach the subject he wished to get at.

After a desultory conversation, Flushton gave him an opening by saying :

"You prefer Flemington, I presume, to Caulfield for training, Dalton?"

"I'm not quite sure about that," said Dalton. "You see at Caulfield it is not so public, and the strength of the horses is not found out so quickly."

"I can assure you they are just as well watched as at Flemington," said Flushton. "Why, only a week or two ago Marlow had a spin with some of his nags, and the affair was all over Melbourne the same day."

"Perhaps," said Dalton; "but then an important trial like that would be well looked after."

"I don't see why it should, more than some of the others," said Flushton.

"St. Almo's the sort of horse wants watching closely, from all accounts, Mr. Flushton. I'm told Marlow fancies he has the Newmarket in his pocket. I heard all about the trial, and I think I know as much about it as you do. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Flushton, that we shall beat St. Almo, and you can put your money on our horse."

"Blue Blood?" said Flushton, with a smile. He fancied he had the measure of Blue Blood pretty accurately, and did not anticipate a beating from that quarter. "St. Almo will beat Blue Blood, Dalton, you may rest assured of that."

"Don't you believe it," said Dalton.

"Well, you've got a nice weight, and Blake's a good jockey. I suppose you'll put Toddy up, as usual?" said Flushton.

Dalton chuckled to himself.

"Blake will almost be sure to ride," said Dalton.

Then as he fancied Blake might have said something about a probability of Jack being put up, he said :

"At least, the choice rests with Sir William, but I think it's sure to be Blake at the finish, whatever rumours may be about before."

"I begrudge you that lad, Dalton. He's a real good jockey. Take my tip, though ; you have a bit on St. Almo."

"Not I," said Dalton ; "why, bless your soul, what have you got to back him on, when he only had a mere lad up in the trial, and carried no weight ?"

"Who told you he carried no weight ?" said Flushton, who had been imbibing Dalton's good wine pretty freely.

"I can't tell you who my informant was, but he's pretty likely to have been correct," said Dalton.

"Now look here, Dalton," said Flushton ; "you know well enough that we should not be such fools as to let people know what that trial amounted to. You've been at the game long enough to give Marlow credit for better management than that."

"I tell you what I'll do," said Dalton. "I'll bet you ten pounds I'm nearer the weight than you are. We can put both weights down on a piece of paper, and I'll let you judge."

"But I know what weight St. Almo carried," said Flushton ; "so it would not be fair."

"No, you'd have a safe thing on in that case," said Dalton, gratified that he had drawn Flushton so well. "Now I know he's got the correct weight it won't be waste of time trying to get at it," thought the diplomatic Dalton.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he went on; "I'll bet you ten pounds I'm right in the weight—or perhaps that's a bit too much in your favour. I'll bet you a 'tenner' I'm within 5 lb. of it."

"Done," said Flushton. "He'll never get within miles of it," he thought. "He'll put about 7 stone down."

Dalton got a piece of paper, wrote 7 stone 8 lb. on it, and handed it to Flushton.

"You've lost," said Flushton, as he read it.

"Have I?" said Dalton; "then my information's not correct, as you said."

"I thought I'd win," said Flushton.

"Here's your tenner," said Dalton. "Did I lose it by much?"

"About a short head," laughed Flushton; "but I'm not going to tell you whether it was more or less."

"I don't want to get at the stable secrets," said Dalton; "so keep your own counsel."

The subject dropped, and presently Flushton rose to go.

He bade Mrs. Dalton a hearty good-night, and said to Hettie:

"I hope we shall be friends, Miss Dalton, now your father has taken me on to his good books. I had no idea the pretty little girl I once met had grown in such a charming young lady."

Hettie said something about flattering, but he assured her there was no flattery about it. He meant what he said. There was no doubt he did at the time, for Hettie's fresh young beauty attracted

Flushton, who had been used to the society of Madge St. George and Bella Luscomb.

Dalton said nothing. He sat in his room after Flushton had gone, and smiled in a self-satisfied manner.

"I think I worked you very well," he said to himself, as he pulled a small slip of paper out of his pocket, on which was scrawled the following:

"Marlow sent Percussion, Buster, Fairfax, and St. Almo a great gallop this morning. Last won, and I hear for certain, carried 8 stone. Must clear all our lot out here. Did Newmarket distance in 16. Best go I've seen here. Can you beat it?"

"Let me see," said Dalton; 7 stone 8 lb I put down, and had to guess within 5 lb. Eight and five are thirteen. He said I guessed to within a short head. That would be about 7 stone 13 lb. Put that down at 8 stone. If St. Almo beat those horses in 16, with 8 stone up, I'll have all my work cut out to beat him with Blue Blood. That tenner was well-laid out. I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Hector Flushton. So Toddy Blake's your pet jockey, is he? If Toddy's not a fool, he'll drop Mr. F.'s acquaintance when I desire it."

As for Flushton, he thought more of Hettie Dalton than about either St. Almo or Blue Blood.

"She's deuced pretty," he said; "I'll have a shy at her. I'm tired of mooning about. Old Dalton's not such a bad sort. He'd make rather a respectable father-in-law."

CHAPTER XI.

BLUE BLOOD SHOWS PACE.

THE result of Dalton's interview with Flushton was that he determined to get the measure of Blue Blood, as he put it, as early as possible. He thought it probable Flushton would tell Marlow what had taken place.

Marlow was a trainer who knew thoroughly what he was about. Ned Dalton respected Marlow's abilities. He did not like the man, but he knew he was a dangerous rival.

Blue Blood's trial took place on one of the "off" mornings at Flemington, and even Dalton was surprised at the way in which he cast the six furlongs behind him.

Jockey Jack rode him in the spin, and said afterwards he felt as though he was flying through the air.

Blue Blood literally lost his stable mates, and clean "broke" Dalton's watch.

As he walked home from the course Ned Dalton felt highly elated.

"If he only does as well in the race we shall beat St. Almo," he thought. "What a cunning beggar Marlow must be. Why he could have won four or five times with Blue Blood had he wished."

"Well, Jack, Blue Blood showed us a real good

go this morning," said Dalton, leaning over the door, and watching Jack groom down his favourite.

"Yes, he did, Mr. Dalton. I never rode such a flyer. If he shows that pace in the race he'll win if he's left at the post," said Jack.

"There must be no leaving at the post when the time comes, Jack. Six furlongs means get well away, and keep there," said Dalton.

Although Blue Blood's trial was kept close, still it leaked out that he had broken the record over six furlongs, at Flemington, and consequently the knowing ones commenced to nibble at him.

Sir William Melissa at times gambled heavily. He was like many another man, liked the cream of the market, and felt annoyed if anyone else secured it before him.

He made no move when Dalton told him of the great gallop Blue Blood had done. The public rushed in, but when it was seen the stable did not follow suit the bookmakers lengthened the price against him. This was precisely what Sir William expected, and he meant to wait until near the Autumn meeting before he commenced operations in the betting market.

Jockey Jack felt elated at Blue Blood's success. He knew what winning a big race like the New-market meant to him, and had not Sir William promised him the mount? He looked at the horse fondly, and thought what a slice of luck it was for him that Blue Blood had come into the stable.

Jack was a favourite in the Hairbell Cottage stable.

His quiet, unobtrusive manners had won him the respect of the lads about the place, and also the men. At first they regarded him as one of the "goody-goody" sort, but they soon found out he had pluck enough when necessary, and that he was as full of fun as themselves at times. Jack was always ready to do a good turn to any of his stable mates. He lent a helping hand to others, and they were quick to recognize he did it freely, and not grudgingly. He never spoke ill of anyone, and had a smooth even temper that stood him in good stead.

Adversity had taught him, as it teaches all children, to think for himself early in life. Before he took to wandering about the streets, earning a stray shilling here and there, Jack had recollections of a woman who was kind to him, and made much of him. Her memory came back to him now as he sat in Blue Blood's box.

As a little chap he had plenty of toys and nice clothes, and was, to all appearances, somebody's darling. But even at this age he was puzzled at his lot, for he never knew what it was to have a mother's love. The woman who looked after him was not his mother. He also recollected a fine handsome lady who came to see him and brought him nice presents and he called her the good fairy. Then came a big cloud in his life. He must have been about six years old, he thought, when his protector died. Her daughter took charge of him, but did not love him, nor was she very kind to him. Jack's memory took him back to the time when she had beaten him soundly for a trifling fault, and he remembered

how he resented it in his childish way, and went out of the house and never returned.

How had he lived until Dalton had found him in the cold streets? What a life it was. And yet even that life had its bright side.

Jockey Jack even now had recollections of "Curly Bob," "Fishy Joe," "Matches," "The Dandy Swell," and his own particular chum "The Fairy."

His chum had appeared on the stage. He was older than Jack, and had taken him under his protection when he found the little fellow lost in the big city. "The Fairy" had a kind heart. He used to say he had a heart as big as a clown's—clown, it may be said, being synonymous with him for all that was wonderful and good. Jack was such a small chap, and didn't eat much, that "The Fairy" agreed to let him share his den with him. This was a commodious cellar in a large hotel where empty cases were stored, and in which the two lads slept for many a night, kept warm by the close atmosphere and their own bodies.

When they were turned out of this retreat they found another, and "The Fairy" generally managed to secure very fair quarters without payment. He considered it a waste of money to pay for sleeping accommodation.

Jack thought of "The Fairy" now, and wondered what he was doing. He wished he could help him. Perhaps some day he might see him, and he felt sure he would know him.

He recollected when he was ill once how "The Fairy" had watched over him, and even pulled off

his own clothes to keep his little mate warm. He remembered how "Fairy" had gone away at top speed, and returned with some "red stuff" in a bottle, which he said he had got at the medicine man's, and how it was bound to cure right away.

"The Fairy" had gone for a trip to Sydney, having obtained an engagement as cabin boy on a schooner, and he was away when Jack happened to fall in with Ned Dalton,

From that day he had never seen the chum of his vagabond early days. He had often looked out for him, but never caught sight of him. Jack fancied he must have gone for a sailor. At any rate, he meant to repay "The Fairy's" kindness if ever he should come across him and he needed it.

"I wonder who my mother really was?" he said to himself. "It would be nice to have a name like other people. Jockey Jack isn't much of a name, and yet I like it because she gave it to me. If I was sure she cared for me a little bit it would be much easier to speak to her. But she can't. How can she care for such a chap as I am?"

He rose from his seat, and after a parting look at Blue Blood, went out.

Jack seldom went into Melbourne, but his morning reflections had made him wish to see the city at night.

Dalton granted his request at once, and said:

"There's no occasion to tell you to be home in good time, Jack. I wish the others were a little less fond of the city."

Jack walked up and down Bourke Street, and he

looked at the Theatre Royal, and thought of the wet, cold night Dalton found him there.

He watched the people going into the theatre, and fancied he might as well go inside himself. Then he said he wouldn't, as it would keep him out too late.

As he stood half hesitating whether to go inside or not, he saw a carriage drive up.

Sir William Melissa handed a lady out.

Jack knew Sir William, and as he looked at his companion he thought he had never seen a handsomer woman.

"That must be Lady Melissa," he thought ; " what a beauty she is ! Sir William's a lucky man. I'd like to have another look at her. I'll go inside."

He went into the stalls, and as he did so, glanced at the circle. He saw Sir William and Lady Melissa had seats at one side in the front row. He sat down where he could see them without turning his head.

Jockey Jack took but little notice of the play. He watched Lady Melissa intently. Her face seemed to fascinate him. There was something about her made him feel curiously sad. He fancied he had seen that face before, but he could not think where. Then he knew it was impossible ; he could never have seen her before.

As Jack went home after the performance he could not help thinking of Lady Melissa, and how beautiful she looked.

He went to bed, still thinking of her, and he lay awake wondering where he had seen a face like hers before.

"She does not look happy," he thought ; " what a

tired look she had. But she must be happy with such a man as Sir William."

Jockey Jack told Ned Dalton next morning he had been to the theatre, and had seen Sir William and Lady Melissa there.

"And what do you think of Lady Melissa?" he asked.

"She is very beautiful," said Jack; "I watched her nearly all the time; I could hardly take my eyes off her."

"She is a handsome woman," said Dalton. "By Jove! she's a bit like you, I think, Jack," he said, with a laugh.

Jack laughed heartily. The idea was so preposterous.

"I'm sure you don't mean it?" he said.

"I do," said Dalton; "although perhaps her ladyship would not be flattered."

He thought no more about it at that time, however, although on a future occasion it was brought vividly to his recollection.

CHAPTER XII.

ST. ALMO'S OWNERS.

AFTER his visit to Dalton's stable Flushton thought over what had taken place there, and the more he thought the more hopelessly bewildered he became.

At last he made up his mind to see Marlow and tell him what had occurred. He went over to Caulfield and found the trainer at home.

St. Almo was the joint property of Flushton and Marlow, and had cost them a fair sum. He was to all appearances the best horse in their stable, but people said "you never can tell what Marlow's up to, he's such a clever beggar."

Flushton related as nearly as he could remember the gist of his conversation with Dalton.

Marlow was not at all surprised at Dalton sending Flushton an invitation to visit him. He saw at a glance he must have an object in doing so. It looked as though Dalton was afraid of St. Almo, and yet fancied Blue Blood.

"Our horse can win, I'm certain," said Flushton, "if he's only got Blue Blood to beat."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Marlow. "I've had Blue Blood in my care, and I know what he is. I can tell you he's a devil of a speedy customer."

"He didn't win much when you had him," said Flushton.

"Probably not, but that don't say he could not have won. You, at any rate, had no cause to grumble when he didn't win," said Marlow.

"Can't say I had," laughed Flushton. "By Jove! you've managed some nice little dodges with that horse, Marlow."

"Never mind that. I know what the horse can do, and you don't. Now, sure as fate, Dalton's tried Blue Blood, and I hear as much from my man at Flemington. He could not tell me the time, but he says that fellow they call Jockey Jack rode the horse, and he cleared the lot out at the finish."

"Blake rides him in the Newmarket," said Flushton, "and he's a friend of mine."

"Are you quite sure?" said Marlow.

"Quite. Dalton told me as much," replied Flushton.

"What sort of a man is Blake to handle?" asked Marlow.

"Easy enough, if you take him right. I know a woman could make him do anything she asked him," said Flushton.

"Poor fellow," said Marlow, "then he's clean gone. I wouldn't give a hang for a fellow that can be led by the nose by a woman."

"I've been thinking," said Flushton, "it would be as well to give St. Almo another spin just to make certain that last go was correct. It was a devil of a trial, and the time was almost too good to be true."

"It was correct, nevertheless," said Marlow. "But

your idea's not such a bad one. Another trial would make a certainty of it, at all events. I've no doubt the result would be the same, still it would give us more confidence. If St. Almo pulls through again we must have a big plunge on him. I want cash. I don't know how you feel in that direction."

"I'm never too well off," said Flushton, with a laugh, "but I generally manage to get some when I want it. If ever I do get down, I've a real good mark to fall back upon."

"Have you?" said Marlow. "Then you're lucky. I wish I could say as much. Who is it?"

"That's a profound secret, Marlow. I have no idea of you jumping my claim," said Flushton.

"You can draw on your friend for two, then, if St. Almo goes down," said Marlow.

"No fear of him going down if he comes out of the second trial as well as he did the first," said Flushton.

Marlow gave instructions for St. Almo to be tried again with Percussion and Resolve, two horses he went with on the former occasion, and some surprise was created in consequence.

Marlow's principal riders were the brothers Joe and Tom Case. They were good jockeys, but not in the front rank, and Tom, although the younger, was the better horseman. Lambton, the well-known jockey, however, rode for the stable in all big events.

When Marlow informed them St. Almo was to be tried again, Joe Case hit upon a plan which, if successfully carried out, he fancied might enrich himself and his brother. Tom Case would ride St.

Almo in the trial again, and Joe would ride Percussion.

Both horses were in the Newmarket Handicap.

The night before the second trial was to take place the brothers sat talking earnestly together in their small chamber.

"Shut the door, and make it fast, Tom. I've something important to tell you," said Joe Case.

Tom got up and fastened the door. Tom Case was a fair sample of a stable lad, and, although a better rider than Joe, looked upon his brother with a considerable amount of respect.

"Well, Joe, what have you been hatching now?" he asked, as he sat down again.

"Sure there's nobody can hear us?" said Joe.

"No," said Tom; "certain of that. But what if they did? What have you got on?"

"I've been thinking Marlow don't treat you fairly, Tom," commenced Joe. "You're a far better rider than I am, and I think you're as good as Lambton, who gets all the best mounts. Why should he get 'em all? When you win, it's sheer good riding does it, because it's ten to one you're on some brute of a horse that has to be ridden devilish well in order to win. Lambton has easy wins because he gets all the good horses to ride. I say it's not fair, and Marlow ought to be made to know it."

"I've no doubt I should do better if I had Lambton's mounts," said Tom; "but I don't see much chance of that. Marlow's not the sort of fellow to throw a race away on purpose to give me a mount."

"It wouldn't be throwing a race away," said Joe.

"But he'd think it would, so it comes to the same thing," replied Tom.

"I've got a plan," said Joe; "and it depends on you to carry it out. If you do, I reckon you'll have a chance of making a name for yourself, and winning both of us some money."

"Let's go for the rhino, anyway," said Tom; "fame's no use if we've got no money. What's your plan, Joe?"

"There's to be a trial to-morrow, as you know, between St. Almo, Percussion, and Resolve. They want to see if the last go was correct. Now, you'll ride St. Almo, I shall ride Percussion, and Teddy will ride Resolve."

"That's all square," said Tom.

"If you win this second trial on St. Almo, it's a hundred pounds to my boot that Lambton will have the mount on him in the Newmarket," said Joe.

"So he will," Tom assented.

"Why shouldn't you have the mount?" said Joe.

"Blest if I know. Don't I wish I could get it. Why St. Almo's a real good thing bar Blue Blood, for Toddy Blake told me that's the horse will win, and we know he was a good one when in our stable."

"Never mind Blue Blood now," said Joe. "We can talk of him after. Will you do what I ask you?"

"What is it," said Tom.

"Listen," said Joe, drawing his chair closer to his brother. "To-morrow morning you'll be on St. Almo and I shall be on Percussion."

"Yes," said Tom.

"Now, you let me win the trial," said Joe.

Tom looked at his brother in amaze.

"What for? What good would that do?" he asked.

"Could you do it without letting Marlow guess the truth?" said Joe.

"You bet I could. He hasn't taught me that trick for nothing," said Tom.

"Well, then, this is what will happen. If St. Almo gets licked by Percussion they'll fancy it's all a mistake, and will have a third trial to decide the matter finally. We shall ride again, and St. Almo must get beaten again," said Joe.

"Yes," said Tom, eagerly, "and what will happen then? Where do we come in?"

"Where do we come in?" said Joe. "It's all plain sailing, and we can make a fortune. If Percussion beats St. Almo twice he'll be the stable horse. Don't you see it?"

"No," said Tom.

"You're thicker-headed than I thought you were," said Joe. "Why, Lambton will have the mount on Percussion, and you'll be put up on St. Almo. You'll have to make the pace for Percussion in the race. You can do it properly. Get well off, ride for your life, lick Percussion and the rest of 'em to smithereens, and say you made the pace as hot as you could, and had to win."

"You're a genius, Joe. Moses, what a lark! I'll do it, you bet, and win the Newmarket. It will show 'em I can ride, at any rate," said Tom, gleefully.

"If St. Almo's beaten twice in his trial they'll back Percussion," went on Joe. "St. Almo will be knocked

out in the betting, and we can get our money on at a deuce of a long price. Oh, it's fine, I reckon. We've got a good thing on this time."

"So we have," said Tom. "We can win a heap of tin. Why, when the sugar goes on Percussion, St. Almo will be knocked back to thirty or forty to one. What a nice little scoop we can make. I'll do it, but you must ride Percussion all you know in the trial. He's pretty fast, and I can steady St. Almo all the way. He's a deuced easy horse to ride."

A nice little plot this ; and Marlow would no doubt have felt edified had he overheard it. He did not, however, and next morning appeared on the course with Flushton, anticipating another easy win for St. Almo. The trial was run in exactly the same way as the former.

Percussion cut out the running, and Joe made the pace as hot as he could. This further deceived Marlow, who did not think the horse could go so fast. St. Almo kept well alongside the leader, while Resolve was soon left behind.

As they neared the winning-post Tom said as loud as he dared to Joe :

"Go on, Joe. Keep it up. I'm right."

"Watch St. Almo leave him now," said Marlow.

"He's full of running," said Flushton.

On came the pair, and Marlow became uneasy. "Hang it all, I can't make it out," he said, as Percussion passed them a length to the good in front of St. Almo. It looked as fair and square a beating as ever one horse gave another.

Flushton's face fell.

"Trial must be all wrong," he said.

"No, it wasn't," said Marlow, "the time's all right. I'd no idea Percussion was as good as that."

"I don't care what the time was," said Flushton; "there's something wrong. I'm sure St. Almo can beat him."

Tom Case, when questioned by Marlow, couldn't account for it.

"He beat me fair and square," said Tom. "I rode him all I knew. It was the pace killed him. That Percussion must be a real daisy."

Joe Case said Percussion went like the wind, and he could have won by more than he did.

The brothers chuckled over the success of their scheme, which seemed likely to be brought to a successful issue.

"I could have romped over you on St. Almo," said Tom. "We've got a real good thing on."

"The time was good, I'll bet, or Marlow would have smelt a rat," said Joe.

Marlow and Flushton held a consultation after the gallop. They could not make it out at all. It upset all their plans. They had not much money on St. Almo at present, but they had pinned their faith to him, and would much rather have him for their candidate than Percussion.

"We must have another trial next week to finally settle it," said Marlow. "If St. Almo gets beaten again we shall know it was no fluke, and the only thing to be done will be to back Percussion. I don't half like it, but that's what we must do."

"We shall have to have another trial, that's

certain," said Flushton ; " and, as you say, if Percussion wins we must back him. Perhaps it will be all for the best in the end, as we shall get a big price about him, bigger than we can get about St. Almo."

"That's settled then," said Marlow. "Another trial next week, and if Percussion wins again we'll go for him for the Newmarket instead of St. Almo."

CHAPTER XIII.

BEATEN AGAIN.

THE brothers Case chuckled inwardly over the success of their *ruse*. Tom had successfully pulled St. Almo under the very noses of Marlow and Flushton, and felt that he could do so again, although he would have to be doubly careful.

The third trial took place in the presence of Marlow and Flushton, and with the same result as the second, except that Percussion beat St. Almo in easier style.

"There's no mistake about it now," said Flushton. "It's lucky for us we have not much money on St. Almo. The public will back him. They're such fools. They'll expect we ran these trials for a blind."

"The backers of horses in these days," said Marlow, "are not such fools as they look. If we back Percussion they'll follow the lead, and St. Almo will be knocked out. We shall have to work very carefully. The odds against Percussion are long enough, and it will be as well to get some money on at the present price. If it's dribbled on slowly it will not be noticed until we have secured a fair stake."

"The chances are," said Flushing, "that there will be a rush on him, if it is as you say; for that first trial of St. Almo's was a real clinker. By Jove! Marlow, I think after all we'd better stick to that."

"After being licked twice! Not me," said

Marlow; "that game may do for you, but I can't see it."

"Very well," said Flushton; "you ought to know more about it than anyone, but recollect, if things don't turn out as we expect, what I said."

Marlow had a long talk with Tom Case about the affair, and the jockey expressed his belief that St. Almo would run well, although Percussion did beat him.

"I'd give him an outside chance, and start 'em both," he said. "St. Almo would be the very horse to make a pace for Percussion."

"If he can't make the pace any stronger than he did this morning he might as well be at home in the stable," said Marlow. "At all events, I'll think the matter over."

He did so, and finally decided to start both St. Almo and Percussion and put Lambton up on the latter and let Tom Case ride St. Almo.

When Joe Case heard this decision he hugged himself for joy. It meant fortune if St. Almo could beat Blue Blood, and he felt sure of it from what he knew of both horses. Tom Case was delighted at the prospect of riding a Newmarket winner and "scooping the pool," as he put it, at the same time.

The betting market soon underwent a decided change, and Ned Dalton could not understand it at all.

"St. Almo's position became shaky, and his name gradually dropped lower and lower in the list of quotations, until it stood at 40 to 1 offered.

As fast as St. Almo went down Percussion came up, until he touched 15 to 1. The public were chary

of backing him, but when it eked out that it was a stable commission had brought him up and sent St. Almo back, they followed the lead.

The most curious part of the business was that there was always some money in the market for St. Almo, and where it came from could not be ascertained.

Ned Dalton, after hearing Flushton's talk about St. Almo, had saved his money on the horse. He never objected to have two strings to his bow, and said to Sir William Melissa, when he asked him the reason, "You see, Sir William, I like to win races with my own horses; but if I lose with them the next best thing is to be on somebody else's horse that happens to win."

Sir William laughed as he said, "You're wise, Ned, in your old age. If you do it I'll do it. Back St. Almo for me to save my Blue Blood money."

"I think we shall beat them," said Dalton, "but there's nothing like making cocksure, so I'll do as you say."

It may be imagined Dalton was not over pleased when he saw St. Almo knocked back to just double the odds he had got his own and Sir William's money on at. He hated being beaten at his own game, and he thought Marlow must have worked some cunning game with St. Almo in order to back Percussion.

Jockey Jack as he looked at Blue Bood cared not a jot which was the better of Marlow's pair provided he could win on his favourite horse.

Matters had advanced to this stage when Hector

Flushton called at Sir William's house one night "on business," he said.

Now Hector had taken particular care to ascertain that Sir William was out of town. He purposely called in order to see Lady Melissa alone.

She received him as he expected she would. Hector Flushton could be very attractive to certain women. When he chose to be agreeable he could pass for a model man.

Lady Melissa had not forgotten early days when she had known Flushton under different circumstances, and knowing that he well knew what her occupation had been before she married she was more candid with him than she might otherwise have been.

They talked about horses, theatres, and society generally.

Hector Flushton talked on mere commonplace topics for some time, and then said suddenly, "By the bye, Lady Melissa, I heard a peculiar story about a lady in Melbourne society the other day. Most remarkable, I can assure you."

"Indeed. And pray how can it interest me?" she asked.

"It may not interest you," he replied, "but as it was most uncommon I thought I would mention it. It's about a married lady, too."

"Some scandal, I suppose," she said.

"It would create a grave scandal if it were known," he replied. "I cannot, of course, mention names, but you know the lady and gentleman well. I may as well say I have positive proof that what I say is correct."

"The lady I allude to is above reproach. She is married to an excellent husband, who believes her all that a pure good woman should be. I believe she is fond of her husband to a certain extent. I accidentally discovered something about this lady, which, I confess, startled me. She must have been married previously to taking her present husband, and I am sure he does not know it."

"That is indeed a dangerous position," said Lady Melissa, and he noticed she had grown pale, and glanced at him curiously and nervously.

"Very compromising for her," he said. "I wonder why she did not tell her husband before she married again. That would have been a simple way out of the difficulty. There is a child of her first marriage."

He saw Lady Melissa start, but she instantly recovered herself. "It's true," he thought.

Then he continued. "From her actions before and after marriage I have come to the conclusion that she has not been married twice, and that she has hidden her true position to save her honour. It is a terrible dilemma for a woman to be placed in, more especially when her story is in the hands of another woman."

"Another woman!" gasped Lady Melissa. "Oh, it's monstrous! I cannot believe it! You are mistaken—you must be!"

"I am not mistaken, Lady Melissa. I wish I were, for the lady I am speaking of I respect very much, and she is a friend of mine. I assure you I discovered her history by accident."

"A child, you said?" asked Lady Melissa.

"There's no doubt about that," said Flushton.

"How can you possibly know that?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"Because I saw——"

"Not the child?" said Lady Melissa, in a trembling voice."

"No," he said.

"What, then?" she asked.

"The certificate of its birth."

"Then, you saw the name of the mother?" she said.

"I did," he replied.

Lady Melissa was silent. Her hands clutched the arms of the easy-chair she was sitting in convulsively. She felt as though she must shriek aloud, but by a great effort she controlled herself. When she had collected her wits together again she said :

"It is a most extraordinary story, Mr. Flushton. As you say the lady is a friend of yours, no doubt you will keep her secret?"

"How can you doubt that, Lady Melissa, when I tell you I care more for that woman than for any being on earth?" he replied, earnestly.

"But you said she was married."

"Unfortunately for me, yes. But I cannot help my feelings. I love her. It may seem wicked to covet my neighbour's wife, but I cannot control myself," he said.

"But does she know you love her?" asked Lady Melissa. "That would make her position more perilous."

"She does know I love her," he replied.

"And she, does she——"

"Return it, you would say, Lady Melissa. No, I do not think she does at present."

Lady Melissa turned white as death.

"At present!" she gasped. "What do you mean, Hector Flushton? Surely you would never force a married woman to compromise herself because you hold her terrible secret? I cannot believe it. No, I will never believe you could be so base—so cowardly!"

"When a man loves he does many things he would not do otherwise," said Flushton, slowly.

"When a man loves," said Lady Melissa, "he guards the honour of the woman he loves with his life."

Hector Flushton did not speak. Lady Melissa had risen and looked at him with a gaze in which amazement, horror, shame and agony were all blended.

"You do not love this woman, Hector Flushton. It is a far baser thing than love of which you speak."

"You seem agitated, Lady Melissa," he said. "I would not have told you the story had I thought it would affect you so. Whatever you may say or think I do love her, and she shall love me. Love knows no laws. With her I would defy the world, and she shall see that it is so."

"I may have been wrong," she said; "I believe what you say. This wretched woman may have inspired you with a love you cannot control. For her sake be generous—be just. Do not tempt her to her fall. I know you will not."

"Lady Melissa, I thank you. You have shown me what I should do. It is late, and I must go. We have had a strange meeting. I am sorry I told you that story."

"Good night, Mr. Flushton. I am always glad to see you, and so is Sir William. Goodnight."

She shook hands with him, and he left without further remark.

When he had gone Lady Melissa sank into her chair, and sat there far into the night. Her thoughts were evidently not pleasant. Pale and haggard she looked, and strangely excited.

"What am I to do?" she murmured. "He will carry out his base designs. I know it. I feel it. He saw the proofs. Who has them? I must find that out at all cost. I must lead him on until I get them. It is terrible work! And he thinks she was not married! That makes his task easier. He must know all. He must know the truth. He said he saw the name on the certificate. What madness to give that name! Courage, courage! Women have fought to death before now to defend their honour. And the child? My God, the child! It is just retribution. Is it dead? Shame and disgrace! Yes, that is what it means. But there will be a bitter fight before the woman you love" — she shuddered — "is humbled in the dust, Hector Flushton!"

CHAPTER XIV.

JACK EXPLAINS.

WHEN a woman is in love she sometimes acts in a peculiar manner to the object of her affections, and to an outsider would convey the impression that she cared very little about him—in fact, rather disliked him than otherwise.

Hettie Dalton did not differ much from other women in this respect. She had suddenly found out her feelings for Jockey Jack were decidedly not of a brotherly nature, and when she overheard the remark he made to Blake about her, she was hurt and angry. She admitted no possibility of an explanation, but at once came to the conclusion that Jack cared very little about her.

Being a young woman possessed of a considerable amount of spirit, after her first disappointment was over she treated Jack in a most off-hand manner, until even her father noticed it and asked her how she had taken such a dislike to him.

Jack felt he merited her displeasure in some measure, but if he could only get an opportunity of explaining matters to her, he thought it would make a considerable difference.

It is said that everything comes to him who waits, and one day the opportunity Jack had been so anxiously looking out for had arrived.

Hettie had been reading a book under a huge tree, in one of the paddocks at some distance from the house, and Jack had been there looking after a couple of yearlings, which were being taught their business.

On his return he espied Hettie evidently utterly unconscious of his presence, and he determined to have it out with her before she could escape. So deeply interested was she in the book she was reading, she did not notice him until he stood before her.

She looked up with a start.

"I have been waiting to speak to you for some time, Miss Hettie," commenced Jack.

"Indeed," she said, raising her eyebrows in evident surprise at such a statement.

"I'm afraid you have been angry and displeased with me," went on Jack. "You overheard some remarks of mine which I had no time to explain to you."

"They can admit of no explanation," said Hettie, "and the sooner we drop the unpleasant subject the better," and she rose to go.

"Don't go Miss Hettie ; please don't," said Jack, so earnestly that she stopped, and her heart beat faster. "Hear what I have to say first, and then condemn me if you will."

"Don't detain me long," she replied.

Jack felt she was relenting, and it gave him fresh courage.

"The words you overheard me say to Blake were only meant to deceive him. I did not mean one

word of what I said. He had been chaffing me, as men will do, and I did not wish my name to be associated with yours in such a manner. I felt you were so far above me that it would be disgraceful on my part to permit such a thing."

"Your words, or at least the words I heard," said Hettie, "did not admit of much doubt."

Jack pleaded long and earnestly, and at last Hettie commenced to relent. She knew by his manner he spoke the truth, and her own heart told her it was so. After all, he had been merely trying to shield her from the idle gossip of the stable.

"Let us say no more about it, Jack, but be good friends again," said Hettie. "I believe what you tell me, but you must admit I had good grounds for being offended."

"You had," replied Jack, "but I felt sure when I explained the matter you would believe me."

No word of love had passed between them, and yet Hettie felt Jack was her own to do as she liked with. The thought gave her considerable pleasure. She knew her father and mother would hardly approve of her choice as yet.

Meanwhile affairs went on smoothly at Hairbell Cottage.

Dalton had heard of the trials between Percussion and St. Almo, but he considered it to be a market ruse in order to get a longer price about St. Almo.

The news of the second trial had somewhat upset his calculations, and the betting market pointed decidedly against the chances of St. Almo.

Flushton called at Hairbell Cottage the afternoon

Jack had had his explanation with Hettie, and consequently she was in a merrier frame of mind than usual.

She looked radiant, and her new happiness made her still more attractive.

Flushton did not see much of her, but he made himself very agreeable, and further impressed Mrs. Dalton in his favour.

Dalton knew him too well to take much notice of his blandishments except that he meant to put Hettie on her guard against his fascinations.

"A nice little game you're working in your stable, Mr. Flushton," said Dalton.

"I don't understand you," he replied.

"Percussion is better than St. Almo, I notice by the betting market," said Dalton.

"You ought to know pretty well what the betting market is like by this time," said Flushton. "The public have rushed him into the forward position because he beat St. Almo in the last two trials."

"Oh," said Dalton. "I'd give a trifle to know which is your best."

"I dare say you would," laughed Flushton; "but I fancy you've hit the mark pretty well now. St. Almo's speed is proverbial, and you must acknowledge if we have a better in the stable our chances must be improved vastly."

"If you have a better than St. Almo you'll win, and beat Blue Blood, but I'm open to bet a trifle St. Almo's the best you've got," said Dalton.

When Flushton left he chuckled to himself, as he fancied he saw Dalton saving the Blue Blood money

on St. Almo, and Percussion beating the pair of them easily.

He walked away quite satisfied with himself and the world in general.

He went into the Victorian Club and booked a few odd wagers about Percussion. There was not much need for concealment now, because the bulk of the money had been got on at a fair figure.

"I see your stable's backing two horses for the Newmarket," said a bookmaker to him.

"That's news to me," said Flushton. "We don't often cut one horse against another."

"That's what surprised me in this instance, but I can assure you there's a lot of money in the market for St. Almo as well as Percussion."

"Who the devil can be backing St. Almo, I wonder?" muttered Flushton to himself. "It's somebody thinks he knows. Well, Mr. Clever will be out this time when he sees Percussion romp home."

There could be no mistake about it. St. Almo was still being backed, and for good money. Marlow and Flushton could not make it out, except on the presumption that the public still stuck to the great performer.

They had no doubt as to the trials being correct, and chuckled as they thought of the cash that would be lost on St. Almo, and probably find its way into their pockets. As usual one or two of the books had received a hint in the matter, coupled with a request to stand in, which was granted. Consequently there was always plenty of money to lay

against the whilom favourite, and Percussion was firmer than ever in consequence.

It can easily be imagined where the money invested on St. Almo came from. The brothers Joe and Tom Case had a fair amount of ready cash to put on, but they had not to appear in the matter themselves. The affair had to be managed with the greatest caution.

Joe Case was familiar with one Reuben Potter, a turf commission agent, who was generally supposed to make a pretty good thing out of backing horses for jockeys.

Joe Case knew exactly how matters stood with Potter, and whether he was in the jockey ring time will show.

After due consideration it had been decided, as somebody must be trusted with the secret, Potter would be as good a man as anyone.

Reuben Potter was a model of discretion when his own interests were concerned. He never "blabbed," as he called it, and when he had work to do he did it himself and trusted no one, which was the great secret of his success.

When Joe Case related the particulars of the trial to Reuben Potter, and told how his brother Tom had hoodwinked Marlow and Flushton, that worthy gazed at the lad with genuine admiration.

Reuben Potter shook Joe Case heartily by the hand, and vowed it was the "biggest monty" he had ever been put on in his life.

"Now look here, Joe," he said, "you leave this matter in my hands. I'll get the money on, and

you shall have a long price, I promise you. Don't breathe a word about it to a soul, and, above all, make that young brother of yours keep his mouth shut. It's the best thing I ever was in. Blue Blood we can save a bit on, as he's real good. There's no chance of getting Jockey Jack in our lot, is there?" he asked.

"Not a hundred to one chance," said Joe; "he's a darned fool. I never came across such a piece of downright simplicity in my life. I know he was offered two hundred to pull Ethiopian at Oakleigh Park, and he wouldn't do it. Went and told the stewards after he'd won the race, and got the fellar sent up for twelve months."

"Can't we get at him anyhow?" said Potter. "It would be as safe as the bank with Blue Blood stiff."

"The only way that I see is to get at Sir William Melissa," said Joe; "he's a devil of a temper if he fancies there's anything cronk, and if a hint could be given him that Jockey Jack was one of 'the ring,' he'd take him off and put Toddy Blake up, and then we'd have a dead 'un."

"That's not a bad idea," said Reuben Potter. "I must work that out. It's difficult and dangerous, but it might be done. But is Toddy Blake safe?"

"He's right. We've had a hard job with him, but he's promised to join us, and he'll be a great help. Toddy's a good rider, and he's got a pretty strong arm."

"By Jove, he has," said Potter; "he nearly pulled the roof off the mouth of one brute he rode for me.

If we can get Jockey Jack to come with Blake some night down to our meeting-place—no, that won't do. He'd peach."

"A letter must be written to Sir William a day or two before the race," said Joe Case.

"That will not give him much time for reflection, and he'll make such a fuss about it, that it's odds Jockey Jack himself declines the mount. The worst of the thing is Dalton and Sir William both swear by the fellow, and it will be hard to shift them."

"Toddy Blake will want a cut in at the stake, I suppose?" said Potter.

"Of course he will. What money can be raised to put on? Tom and I have about five hundred," said Joe Case.

"If we've a bank of a thousand we can win a big pot, twenty thousand at the least, and it won't be necessary to save on Blue Blood if we've Toddy up. It's a great scheme. Joe, you're a brick. I couldn't have worked out as good a thing myself, and that's saying a lot."

"It is," said Joe; "I never heard you own up as much as that before."

So the conspirators decided to make a dead set at Jockey Jack, and, if possible, get him taken off Blue Blood.

Jockey Jack's reputation so far had been of the best possible kind. His action in the Ethiopian matter alluded to had given him a standing it would be difficult to shake. Then he was in a good stable, and Ned Dalton was never known to run a horse

stiff, or keep a man in his employment who was found out in any crooked business.

The schemers, of whom Reuben Potter was at the head, knew this, and they felt the more incensed against Jockey Jack in consequence. Reuben Potter was very cunning, and his fertile brain would no doubt work out some scheme for Jack's disparagement. Potter had sense enough to know that Ned Dalton would be slow to believe ill of his jockey, but Sir William, he fancied, could be got at. He therefore determined to open fire upon Sir William on the first favourable opportunity presenting itself.

CHAPTER XV.

SIR WILLIAM GROWS SUSPICIOUS.

THE more Sir William studied Lady Melissa the more puzzled he became. He was decidedly uneasy about her. He felt sure she had something on her mind, and was concealing it from him.

Ever since her interview with Hector Flushton Lady Melissa had been a changed woman. She seemed to shun the society of her husband, and, unfortunately, he perceived it. It cut her to the heart to appear cold and distant to him, and yet she felt she could not act otherwise. The terrible secret of her life she had fancied buried in oblivion, and now, just when she had commenced to forget, she was confronted with a double danger. She was not sole possessor of that secret. It was bad enough for a man of Hector Flushton's disposition to know it, but it was ten times worse for a woman who probably was in love with Flushton to know it also.

Raised as she had been in society by her marriage, she knew there were scores of envious people who would hail her downfall with keen delight. The scandal would kill her, and drive Sir William almost mad. And she loved him. There was the bitterest blow of all. Gradually she had become more and more attached to him. When first they were married she had not felt for him as she felt now.

The more Lady Melissa brooded over Flushton's visit the firmer became the resolve she had made.

It was risky, hazardous in the extreme. Her honour might be compromised, and her name held up to the scorn of the world. She felt, however, it was her only chance of success.

She must get those papers, but how? A bold, desperate woman she had become. She would fight Hector Flushton with his own weapons. How she loathed the man, and yet she would pretend to love him, and to accede to his desires. She would use all woman's art to extract the name of the woman who held those papers in her possession.

If necessary she would compromise herself so far with Hector Flushton as to go to the house where the woman lived to get those papers.

Sir William was, however, growing suspicious, and this made her task more difficult. He had heard of Hector Flushton's prolonged visit during his absence, and for the first time in his life he felt jealous.

It may easily be imagined that Sir William and Lady Melissa were not pleasant company for each other. She declined to talk much, and he appeared incessantly bored, and stayed away at his club until late at night.

It was after visiting his club and returning home earlier than usual that he met Hector Flushton leaving the house. He saw him before he passed through the gate, and, drawing on one side, let him go without being recognized.

Lady Melissa had opened fire that night, and had raked Hector Flushton with the artillery of her

beautiful eyes to such an extent that he went away literally riddled through and through, and an easy prey to his fair hostess.

Sir William entered the house in a sullen mood, and went straight to the drawing-room, where he saw lights burning. He spoke abruptly as he said :

"I saw Flushton leave the house as I came in."

"Yes," was Lady Melissa's answer.

"He must find some powerful attraction here ; he seems to come pretty often," said Sir William.

"He's your friend, not mine," said Lady Melissa.

"Is he?" said Sir William. "He seems to find your society more congenial ; I notice he generally calls when I am out."

"Does he?" said Lady Melissa. "Really, I never noticed it."

Her tone irritated him, and she should have been more careful.

"I don't like him coming here in my absence. It does not look well. People will talk."

"Who dare talk about me?" said Lady Melissa, angrily. "Have you been asking the servants?" she went on, contemptuously.

He winced. He had asked Marks about Hector Flushton's visits.

"I can't say they talk now," he said, "but they will. I will not have Hector Flushton or any other man leaving my house at eleven at night when I am not at home."

"I had no idea it was so late," said Lady Melissa. "You had better tell Mr. Flushton yourself. It will show what implicit confidence you place in your wife."

"Nora," said Sir William, and she started. It was not often he called her Nora.

"Nora," said Sir William. "I cannot make you out of late. You seem to have something on your mind, something you are hiding from me. What is it? Trust me, Nora, I am sure you will not regret it. We have been estranged of late. Perhaps there are faults on both sides. Come, Nora, let us be good friends again, and trust me."

He spoke kindly, and a great yearning came over her to tell him all. Had she acted on that first impulse all would have been well. Unfortunately she did not.

"I dare not tell him," she thought, "he would never forgive me."

Aloud she said :

"I do trust you, William. Why cannot you trust me? Believe me when I tell you there is not a man on this earth I despise more than Hector Flushton."

He started at the vehemence of her tone, as he said :

"I do believe you, Nora. If Flushton is so distasteful to you, I will forbid him the house."

"No ; don't do that," she replied, quickly, "it will not look well—at least not yet."

"Oh, very well," he replied, "as you like, but if you despise him so I should have thought you would be glad to get rid of him at any cost."

Lady Melissa thought "he little knows what it would cost me to get rid of him."

"Let us drop the unpleasant subject," said Lady Melissa.

"We will," said Sir William. "Good night, I'm going to have a smoke," and he left the room.

"Not good night, Nora," she thought, with a sigh. She knew his suspicions had not been lulled to sleep.

When Sir William entered the drawing-room he found his wife had gone. He sat down near the fireplace, and looked moodily into the empty grate.

Suddenly his eye rested upon a piece of paper on the floor. He picked it up, and glanced at it mechanically. It did not concern him, he supposed, and it must be some of Lady Melissa's note-paper.

He opened it out merely to occupy time, when he saw she had written something upon it. Only two words, and yet he felt curiously attracted by them. They were "The Diamonds."

What could she want writing "The Diamonds" on a piece of paper. Perhaps she had sent her diamonds to the jeweller's to be reset, or something of that kind.

Sir William knew "The Diamonds," the residence of Bella Luscombe, but it never struck him to connect the writing with such a place.

At the first glance the words had seemed strangely suggestive, but he laughed as he twisted up the paper and put it on the table.

Next morning he said at breakfast:

"Have you sent your diamonds to the jeweller, Nora?"

"No," she replied; "why do you ask?"

"Because I found a piece of paper on the hearth-rug last night with 'The Diamonds' on it, and I

fancied it might have been a memorandum of yours about them."

Lady Melissa turned pale as death. She almost let her cup fall. Luckily Sir William was reading the paper and did not see her.

"I am going to send them," she said after a pause, during which she recovered herself somewhat; "they want resetting."

"Shall I take them for you?" he asked.

"Don't trouble, I shall be in town this morning," she replied.

"What a narrow escape!" she thought when he had gone.

She had obtained the name of the woman who had the papers mentioned by Hector Flushton, and also her address. It was a lucky thing she had not put Florrie St. George on the paper as well as "The Diamonds"; that would have betrayed all.

"The Diamonds," she instinctively felt by the very name, was not a fit place for a lady to visit, but she must see this Florrie St. George and get the papers at any cost. She must go with Flushton to this place, and he must obtain the papers for her. There would be a great risk in this, but it must be done.

She knew Hector Flushton well enough now, and saw he meant to compromise her if possible. Here was his opportunity. If she were seen in his company that would be quite enough to alarm Sir William, but if he heard of her visiting such a place as "The Diamonds" with him, there was no telling what construction he might place upon her conduct.

Hector Flushton was not a man to be easily baulked of his prey. He might demand the price of the papers before he gave them into her possession, and what could she do then? If driven into a corner, she would confess all to Sir William, and throw herself upon his generosity. This must be a last resource. She must save him that pain, if possible.

It was evident Lady Melissa had a difficult task before her, but she was not a woman to be easily daunted.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE JOCKEY RING.

THE BRIGHTSIDE INN was a well-known sporting resort, and the jockeys and stable hands always found their wants attended to with alacrity by Peter Flowers, the landlord, and his buxom daughter, Lily.

Peter Flowers' business at the Brightside Inn was on the increase, and of late he had been so liberally inclined that Miss Lily wondered "what had come over father." She recollected the time when he grumbled if she hinted at a new hat, and swore if such a piece of extravagance as a new dress were mentioned. Now, he actually asked her if she "wanted a new rig-out," or, if she "didn't think a new dress would put her up in the market a bit."

The fair Lily of Brightside had numerous admirers, and, perhaps the most assiduous in his attentions to her was young Tom Case, the jockey.

She liked the lad, who was younger by several years than herself, and when her father chaffed her about it, said there was more in the youngster than people gave him credit for. Tom Case made her presents, and Lily Flowers was not proof against this kind of love-making.

At the Brightside Inn, in the back parlour, were collected a number of young fellows all sportingly

inclined. The brothers Case were there, Toddy Blake and several other jockeys. About ten were present.

"Where's Reuben to-night, I wonder?" said Joe Case. "He said he'd be here punctual. We've got to make Toddy Blake one of us to-night."

"That's right," said one jockey. "I knew you'd join us, Blake, and you bet you'll not regret it."

"I don't know so much about that," said Blake. "I've half a mind to draw out now, but it seems a real dead cop, and I'm short of money."

The truth was Blake had found Miss St. George a somewhat expensive acquaintance, and he knew if he had no money he would lose her quickly.

"Here's Reuben," came in general chorus from the men.

Reuben Potter, the bookmaker and "turf commission agent," as he loved to style himself, evidently knew he was expected, and greeted the company heartily.

"Glad to see you here, Blake," he said, as he shook him by the hand. "You're a sensible fellow to come in with us. Hallo, Peter, let's have drinks round."

"Right you are, Mr. Potter," said the landlord, as he bustled in for the order.

When the glasses had been emptied, Potter suggested they should adjourn, and accordingly they went upstairs to a quiet room at the back of the house, where there was no chance of their conversation being overheard.

The first business was to swear in Toddy Blake,

and this was done with due formality by Reuben Potter.

When Toddy heard the consequences of any betrayal of the cause he had espoused, he felt alarmed at what he had done. He knew now it was too late, that if he went back on his mates his occupation would quickly be gone, and that his career as a jockey would be at an end. He put a bold face on the matter, however, and quieted his conscience by reflecting that he should speedily earn money for his inamorata.

"Now you're duly initiated into the jockey ring," said Potter, "and if you stick to it you'll make a fortune."

"That's what I want," said Toddy. "you don't suppose I joined out of sheer devilment and love of the thing?"

"The next business," said Reuben, is to decide what shall win the big handicap at —, and he named the race meeting, which came off on the next day near Melbourne.

The jockeys had by this time got their engagements, and knew which horses they were to ride.

"What do you ride, Tom Case?" asked Reuben.

"Old Joe," said Tom; "and he's a deuced good chance of winning."

"Well I guess he'll be about favourite in this company," said Reuben. "Suppose we stiffen him?"

The others present, nearly all of whom had mounts in the race, named what they were to ride.

Reuben Potter wrote down the horses' names and the riders opposite to them. He looked at the

weights and weighed up their chances. Reuben was a student of form, as most bookmakers are, and he could tell pretty well which horses were likely to be backed by the public, and which by their owners.

After a brief scrutiny of the paper before him, he said :

"If we could win with Tommy the Second it would be a good haul for us. He's sure to be at a long price, and I can work the commission quietly. Then I can field heavily against your other mounts, which really have no chance," he went on, with a smile. "There's two or three thousand pounds sticking out of this little spec."

Toddy Blake pricked up his ears. He had a mount in the race on one of Dalton's horses called *Prairie*, and he knew it had a good chance.

"I'll bet all our people go for my mount," he said.

"Will they?" said Reuben; "so much the better. You can make their cash pretty safe, at any rate."

So it was agreed that Tommy the Second was to win the — *Handicap*.

They left the house in straggling order, and at intervals, so as not to attract attention.

Reuben Potter stayed behind, and Joe Case also remained, but sent his brother away to catch the Caulfield train.

"There's no need to let 'em into our little New-market scheme," said Reuben; "you see Blake's a new hand, and I hardly trust him as far as that yet. As for the others, let 'em ride straight if they like. We must make a dead certainty of likely horses with men up, though."

"The less people are in the know about the St.

Almo affair the better," said Joe Case. "I don't see what it has to do with them. It's outside the ring altogether, this affair."

"Of course it is," said Reuben; "now you'd better be off. I'll see you out there to-morrow, and if Tommy the Second wins, what a surprise it will be for 'em. Another reversal of public form, eh?" laughed Reuben.

He turned to the bar to chat with Lily, and Joe Case went towards the station.

"What will win to-morrow, Mr. Potter?" said Lily.

"Really I don't know, Lil," he said; "your devoted admirer, Tom Case, fancies he has a chance on Old Joe."

"Does he? He didn't tell me to back him, and I'm sure he would have done if he'd thought it would win."

"Perhaps he'll back something for you on his own account," said Potter.

"Very likely. He generally does. Tom's a good fellow," she said.

More customers coming in, Miss Flowers had to attend to their wants.

"What must I back to-morrow, Mr. Potter?" said Peter Flowers.

"Old Joe's a chance, I think," said Reuben; "but if I were you I'd just put a modest sov. on an outsider. He's been doing good work lately, and might get home."

"What is it?" said Flowers.

"Don't you mention it to a soul, not even Lil," said Reuben.

"Not I," replied Flowers. "Do you think I'm

such a fool? She'd split it all over the bar to the first fellow that asks her."

"Would she?" said Reuben; "then tell her Old Joe will win, or, barring him, Prairie."

"All right," replied Peter; "but what about this outsider?"

Reuben whispered in his ear.

"Nonsense," said Peter, fairly astonished. "Why he couldn't raise a gallop at Moonee Valley the other day."

"Perhaps he wasn't wanted," said Reuben; "if you don't like my advice, leave it alone."

When Peter's daughter asked him what would win, he said Reuben Potter tried to "kid him" Tommy the Second was the horse, but he knew better. If she wanted a bit on, he'd lay her a new dress to nothing on Prairie.

Lily Flowers accepted the offer with the air of a woman accustomed to such things, but she inwardly resolved to have a couple of pounds on Tommy the Second for all that. She knew Reuben Potter better than her father did, and had the more respect for him because he did not "talk."

The races came off the next day, and when the result of the big handicap came through, it read:—Tommy the Second, 1; Prairie, 2; Redwing, 3.

Then did Peter Flowers rave and tear his hair, and curse himself for not backing the winner.

"I could have got twenty to one about it," he said to Lily.

"Then you should have backed it," she replied. "I did."

"You did!" he said.

"Of course. When Reuben Potter give's a tip it's generally worth following, more especially if it's an outsider."

"You've more sense than I have," he said.

"I'm glad you think so," was her rejoinder.

Ned Dalton was not at all satisfied with Prairie's defeat. He had looked upon the race as a real good thing, and had told Sir William Melissa so. Consequently that gentleman had plunged rather heavily on it.

Dalton did not like to accuse Blake of not trying his best, and yet he felt confident the horse had not been allowed to win.

"If any other horse had beaten him I shouldn't have thought so much about it, but Tommy the Second to put Prairie down, why, I could hardly believe my eyes!"

"I've an idea, Sir William," he said, "that a good many of our jockeys are in league with each other, and pull horses as they think fit. I know for a positive fact that there was a commission in the market for Tommy the Second, and yet the stable had not a cent on. The men who worked that commission must have known something. People don't throw money away on the off chance. I'll watch Blake carefully, and, by George, if I catch him up to any games with my horses I'll have him warned off for life!"

"The horse seemed to finish well," said Sir William. "I fancied Blake made his run a bit too late. It may have been an error of judgment."

"It may be as you say, Sir William, but I have

my doubts. I shall give Jockey Jack all the mounts I can, but some of the owners are still prejudiced against him. Why I can't imagine, because I'll swear the fellow's honest."

"I like him," said Sir William ; "As you know, he shall ride Blue Blood for me. I must say, however, Blake seems the more finished horseman of the two."

"He rides prettier," said Dalton. "Jack's not what you'd call a good fellow to look at on a horse, but he's a great judge of pace, and his hands—well, nearly as good as Hales's, I can't say more."

"No, indeed you can't," laughed Sir William. "Hales has wonderful hands on a horse."

Dalton saw Jockey Jack, and, in the course of conversation, said :

"I can't account for Prairie's defeat, Jack. How do you think it happened ? You saw the race."

"I thought Toddy left his run until too late. Prairie ought to have won, I've no doubt of that, because he wasn't in the least distressed."

"He ought to have won, that's sure," said Dalton "It can't be helped now, but if anything else like this happens I'll know the reason why."

Toddy Blake was quite hilarious that night, and Jack remarked he seemed as jolly as if he'd ridden the winner."

"What's the odds," said Blake. "I'm not going to be miserable because Prairie couldn't win. I did my level best, you may bet."

"I hope you did," said Jack ; "but if I were you I'd be a bit more careful. The boss don't half like

it, and I'm not surprised at it. Prairie was a good thing for that race."

"What do you mean?" said Blake, savagely. "Do you mean I pulled the horse?"

"I didn't say so," replied Jack.

"And you'd better not!" retorted Blake. "Who the devil are you? Why, you ain't even got a name. Jockey Jack, is it? What owner would like to see a name like that on his horse?"

"Take care," said Jack. "You may go a bit too far."

"May I, oh, dear me. You're one of those street brats Dalton's always picking up, and robbing decent jockeys by teaching them how to ride a bit."

Jack kept his temper down.

"I wonder you don't go in for Hettie Dalton. Well, you'll not have much show there. She'll be Hector Flushton's——"

"Wife," said Jack, mechanically.

"No, not his wife. Flushton ain't one of that sort. She'll be his——"

Before he could say the word he was about to utter Toddy Blake felt as though a thunderbolt had fallen and hit him in the mouth. He staggered and then fell down. When he had sufficiently recovered it dawned upon him that Jockey Jack had struck him. He gathered himself up and rushed at his opponent. A sharp tussel ensued, but Blake was fain to confess he'd never got such a hiding in his life, and he "didn't think the little beggar had it in him."

He didn't say much to Jack about the affair, but he vowed if ever he could do him a bad turn he would not be slow to avail himself of the opportunity.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE BRIGHTSIDE INN.

HECTOR FLUSHTON often paid a visit to the Brightside Inn, and Miss Lily Flowers welcomed his arrival as a relief from the monotony of stabledom. Not that the young lady objected to "talk race." As a matter of fact she seldom talked about anything else, but she liked to hear a little city gossip. She did not particularly care for Flushton, although he flattered her and made her occasionally somewhat expensive presents. She was a wideawake young lady, and when Flushton gave her a rather better gift than usual she wondered to herself what was in the wind.

The Monday following Tommy the Second's victory Flushton called at the Brightside Inn.

He found Lily Flowers in command of the establishment, her father having gone to Melbourne. She was in a gay and festive mood consequent upon Tommy's victory.

"Good morning, Mr. Flushton," she said. "Do you want to see father, because if you have come for that purpose I may as well tell you he's out."

"I came to see you, of course, Lily ; you know I always come to see you. I've got something for you. Something you said you would like very much the last time I was here," he said.

"Indeed," said Lily, with a toss of her head. "I suppose you had a good win on Saturday."

"Not I. Nobody ever thought that brute Tommy the Second could win. I didn't give him a hundred to one show. I backed Prairie—thought it was a good thing. Blest if I think Blake tried all he knew," said Flushton.

"Nonsense," said Lily. "Ned Dalton's horses always try to win. Can't say the same for your stable."

Flushton laughed as he said :

"Come now, Lil, no need to grumble at our stable. You generally manage to win when we do, though where you get the information from I can't make out."

"Not from you, at any rate," she said ; "and I'm not likely to let you know where the tips come from."

"I'm not in the habit of telling stable secrets," said Flushton ; "and least of all to one of your sex, Miss Lily."

"And pray, why not ?" she asked.

"Because I never found a woman yet who could keep a secret," he replied. "But don't be offended, Lily. Here's what you wanted," and he handed her a very handsome chain bracelet.

"How lovely!" she exclaimed. "Thank you so much, Mr. Flushton. It is good of you."

She thought to herself, "He must be anxious to get something out of me. I must be on my guard."

"Has Blake been here this morning?" he asked.

"No," said Lily. "Did you want to ask him why he didn't win on Prairie?"

"If I did ask him he wouldn't tell me," said Flushton. "Blake's as close as wax."

"Is he? That's all you know about it," she said.

"Of course he may yield to your fascinations. It would be hard to resist them," said Flushton.

"Blake has no need to tell me anything, and he never does. All the same, I backed the winner on Saturday," she said.

"You backed Tommy the Second!" he said, surprised.

"Of course I did. I was told he was sure to beat Prairie," she said.

"Who could have told you that?" said Flushton. "The horse couldn't win a selling race the other day. I never saw such a reversal of form."

"Never mind who told me. I'm not likely to tell you. The tip was good enough, wasn't it?"

"Yes," he replied. "What price did you get?"

"Twenty to one," she said; "nice winning odds, are they not?"

"Very," he said; "but don't often come off."

"I hear you're going to win the Newmarket Handicap with St. Almo?" said Lily.

"Are we, indeed? That's more than I know," he said.

"Of course it is," she said; "but he's a good chance, hasn't he, Mr. Flushton? Do tell me. I can get good odds now, and want to invest a bit of my winnings on a double."

"Well, I think you may pick him for the first race," he said; "and you'll have a good run for your money."

"I'll back him," she replied. "What do you like for the Australian Cup?"

"Don't know," he said; "better leave that alone."

"How would St. Almo and Blue Blood go?" she asked.

"Blue Blood? Why, he can't stay over a mile!" replied Flushton.

"Oh, can't he? That's all you know about it. You Caulfield men know very little what our Flemington horses can do."

"I know Blue Blood is no stayer, at any rate," he replied. "We had him in our stable for some time."

"Yes, that's against him," said Lily, with a merry laugh.

Toddy Blake entered the bar and nodded to Lily.

"Hello, Blake," said Flushton. "I thought perhaps you'd drop in. I was just asking Lily if you told her Tommy the Second would win; she says she backed it."

"Then she didn't get her information from me," growled Blake. "If I'd told her I'd have expected all Newmarket to be on it."

"Then you knew the horse had a chance?" said Flushton.

"Not I," said Blake. "I thought it was any odds Prairie beat him."

"You didn't seem to ride Prairie out," said Flushton.

"What's the good of riding 'em out when they're licked," said Blake.

"Have a drink?" said Flushton.

"Don't mind. Whisky and milk, Lil," he replied.

"You'll get fat on that," said Flushton.

"Much I care about getting fat. I'm sick of it. Here's that fellow Jockey Jack, got the leg up on Blue Blood for the Newmarket when I ought to have the mount."

"And haven't you?" said Flushton, with well-feigned surprise.

"No. It's a piece of infernal favouritism on Dalton's part. He's a fool where Jack's concerned," said Blake.

"Jockey Jack's as good as you any day," said Lily.

"Much you know about it," growled Blake. "What does a woman know about riding horses."

"More than you think," said Lily. "You're not likely to have the mount if you ride horses as badly as I hear you rode Prairie."

"Who says I rode Prairie badly?" said Blake, wrathfully.

"Heaps of people," said Lily. This was not exactly true, but it touched Blake under the circumstances.

"I wish the chattering fools would keep their tongues still. If people back a horse and it loses they always blame the jockey."

"So they do," said Flushton. "It's a shame, Blake. I backed Prairie, and I'm satisfied."

Blake had a couple more drinks, and became talkative.

He went outside with Flushton, and Lily thought "they're up to no good," and went near the window underneath which they were seated.

"Look here, Blake," she heard Flushton say, "it's a shame you've not the mount on Blue Blood. Would you like it?"

"Of course I should like it. You bet. He'll win the Newmarket."

"Don't make so cock-sure of that," said Flushton. "I'll tell you how you can get the mount on Blue Blood. Come along with me to the city, and I'll explain matters."

"All serene," said Blake, and they went towards the station.

"There's mischief brewing," thought Lily, "and if Blake's to get the mount on Blue Blood there must be some underhand work against Jockey Jack. I'll put him on his guard. I like him, he's a good sort, whoever he is," and Lily sighed. "He doesn't often come here. I'll write to Hettie if he does not come in this week. I'll not stand by and see him put upon. Wonder if Tom Case would help me. I reckon Tom's pretty fond of me. I'll try him if it comes to a pinch. I never did think much of Flushton. Wonder what he gave me that bracelet for," and she took it off her wrist. "Wanted to find out whether Prairie was stiff, I suppose. Well, he can't pump me. I never got one of the boys into a scrape yet, and I'm not going to begin on Hector Flushton's account. Ah, well! it's no concern of mine; but Jack shan't be taken off Blue Blood if I can help it by giving him a hint. I'll back St. Almo and Blue Blood. Why shouldn't he stay the Cup course? Any way I'll chance it for a fiver."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANONYMOUS LETTERS.

"CURIOUS," thought Sir William Melissa. "I wonder who can have sent this precious document."

He held in his hand a letter he had just perused. Its contents had evidently not pleased him, nor had the style in which it was written.

The letter which Sir William had received read as follows:

"I have to warn you against the Jockey I hear you are going to put on Blue Blood in the Newmarket Handicap. He is not safe. The one I allude to is known as Jockey Jack. He is a member of the now somewhat notorious jockey ring, and if you want proof of this I can give it you. Be at the Brightside Inn next Saturday night, between eight and nine, and you will see him there. The "ring" meets at Flowers' place that night, and you can see for yourself that he is one of them."

The letter was unsigned.

Sir William drove over to Dalton's, and found the trainer at home.

Dalton read the note and then put it down.

"What do you think of it," said Sir William.

"I think it an infernal lie. I'd stake my reputation the lad's honest. I know him too well. He

hasn't been with me all these years without my finding out what he's made of."

"What would you advise me to do?" asked Sir William.

"Burn the letter, and treat it with the contempt it deserves," said Dalton.

Sir William hesitated. He felt it would be the more manly course to pursue. He said :

"As you say, Dalton, the fellow's honest, no doubt. That being so there will be no harm in seeing if he goes to the Brightside Inn. If he does, there must be something wrong, or how would the writer of this letter know he would be there."

"If he happens to go there to-night," said Dalton, "it's no proof of his being in the ring with the fellows. He may go on private business."

"But how should the writer of this letter know he would go there on this particular night. Does he often go there?" said Sir William.

"Very seldom," said Dalton. "He hardly ever goes out at night. He's a steady fellow, and saves his money. I wish there were more like him."

"Then if he happens to go to-night it will tell against him," said Sir William.

"It might look strange," said Dalton, "but I should trust him even then."

Strange to say Jockey Jack had received an anonymous letter the same morning Sir William Melissa's arrived.

It was evidently written by a woman, and its contents deeply interested Jack. It read as follows :

"If you desire to hear something of importance

about your parents be at the Brightside Inn between eight and nine on Saturday night. This is no idle tale. It is a matter that you have a right to learn." Signed, "A friend."

Who could have sent him the letter? Jack pondered over it in deep thought. He would give all he possessed to discover the secret of his birth. However lowly might have been his parents, still if he had the right to bear an honest name it would be much to him. How could he think of Hettie, when he had no name to give her. True, she would take him as he was, but he could not do that ; besides, her parents would never permit it. He would go to the Inn at the time named, and learn what this woman had to tell him. He could make some excuse to Dalton, and as he did not often go out no objection would be raised.

On Saturday afternoon Jack went to Dalton and said he wished to go out that night for a few hours, and would he leave some one else in charge.

Ned Dalton looked at Jack curiously. He fancied he detected something unusual in him. He thought he looked uneasy and nervous. Could that letter be true. No, he would never believe it.

"All right, my lad. Don't be late. You must keep in good order to ride Blue Blood," he said. "Going into the city?"

"No,—I hardly know yet," said Jack, in a half hesitating way.

"That's not his usual form," thought Dalton. "Hang me if I don't think there's something in the wind!"

Jack spent a restless afternoon, and was so eager

to learn what important news had to be communicated to him, that he reached the Brightside Inn before eight o'clock.

He talked in a mechanical kind of way to Lily Flowers, who was fond of him, and tried to draw him out.

At a quarter past eight he commenced to be uneasy.

Toddy Blake came in, and entered into conversation with him.

"You look glum to-night, Jack. What's the matter with you?" said Blake.

"A bit out of sorts," said Jack.

"We don't often see you here," said Blake. "What made you honour us with your company?"

"Nothing particular," said Jack.

Blake did not stay many minutes. He left the house and went straight to Dalton's house. It had been arranged he should do so. It would never have done for Blake to have been seen with the others.

About half a dozen jockeys were left in the Inn, and they chattered gaily with Jack and Lily.

Presently a little urchin brought in a note, gave it to Lily Flowers, and went away at once.

She looked at it, and saw on it "Jockey Jack."

"Here's a note for you, Jack," she said. "A lady's handwriting, too. Well, I am surprised."

Jack took it, but said nothing. He was too agitated. The note ran:

"Forgive me. I cannot come to-night. It is not my fault. I am watched. Keep secret what I have told you, as you value your mother's honour. Do not let a living soul know what I have written.

You shall hear more when I can send with safety. Burn this note. It will be better you should do so."

Jack was sorely disappointed. He re-read the note and the words "Keep secret what I have told you, as you value your mother's honour," made his pulses tingle with feelings he could not describe.

The jockeys had adjourned to a small room behind the bar, and they called Jack in.

To be disagreeable or unsociable might have attracted attention, and his conduct would be attributed to the effect of the letter he had received.

He went into the room, and talked with those present.

A hansom rattled up to the door, and no less a personage got out than Sir William Melissa.

"Has Mr. Flushton been here to-night?" he asked.

"No, Sir William," said Lily. "But he may drop in later on."

He merely made his question an excuse for his appearance.

"Not many customers in to-night, Miss Flowers," he said.

"There are some jockeys in the back parlour playing cards, or amusing themselves with a little horse talk," she replied.

"I want to send a note to Mr. Dalton," he said. "Have you anyone you could send with it?"

"Jockey Jack's in that room. I've no doubt he'll take it with pleasure. It's not often he comes here, Sir William, but I fancy he must have had an appointment to-night."

"Indeed," said Sir William. "Why so?" "Jack's

here, then," he thought. "So the letter is correct after all.

"A letter came for him, and when he received it he didn't seem so impatient as he was before. Perhaps it was to put off the appointment," she said.

Lily Flowers meant no harm in what she said, but she could not help having a little gossip with Sir William, and said what came into her mind without thought.

Lily Flowers took Sir William into the private sitting-room, and gave him pen, ink, and paper.

He sat down and wrote :

"BRIGHTSIDE INN."

"DEAR DALTON,

"I was right in coming here to-night. Jockey Jack's here, and in a private room with half a dozen more of them. He evidently had an appointment to-night, as a note was brought for him and given to Miss Flowers. They perhaps suspected something, and it was to warn him. I write this hurriedly to send by him to you.

"W. MELISSA."

"Give that note to Jack, please," he said to Lily Flowers.

At that moment the parlour door opened, and Jack came out of the room. Sir William could see there were several more inside, but could not tell who they were.

Jack looked surprised and, Sir William thought, confused at seeing him.

He gave him the note and asked him to give it to Dalton as soon as he reached the cottage.

Jack promised to do so, although he would much rather Sir William Melissa and Ned Dalton had not known of his visit to the Brightside Inn.

When he reached Hairbell Cottage he asked for Mr. Dalton, and handed him the note.

Dalton read it, and then looked sternly at Jack.

"Come in here," he said, and led the way to his own private room.

Jack followed, wondering what he could have to say to him.

"You were at the Brightside Inn to-night, then?" said Dalton.

"Yes," replied Jack.

"What did you go there for? I don't ask you out of idle curiosity. It is important you should tell me," said Dalton.

"I cannot tell you why I went there," said Jack, slowly.

"You must," said Dalton.

"Mr. Dalton, you have been to me the best friend I ever had in the world. I have never had a harsh word from you. I would tell you why I went to the Brightside Inn if I were at liberty to do so," said Jack.

"Hum!" said Dalton. "Now look here, young 'un, I won't beat about the bush. Sir William Melissa had a note sent to him. He showed it me. I read it, and its effect was that you were a member of the jockey ring, and were to be at a meeting there to-night between eight and nine. You were there, and he saw you, it appears. You know what that means?"

"No," said Jack, thunderstruck. He never connected the fact of his receiving a letter with Sir William's presence there. Jack had a peculiarly

honest nature, and he never doubted for one moment that his unknown correspondent had told him the truth.

"Then I'll tell you," said Dalton. "It means once Sir William suspects you of being in the jockey ring, he won't let you ride his horses. That means you won't be up on Blue Blood in the Newmarket."

Jack turned pale. It was the height of his ambition to ride Blue Blood in that race. He had dreamt about it, and indulged in pleasant castle-building over it for weeks. And now he was to be taken off because he was suspected of dishonesty.

"I did not attend a jockey's meeting," said Jack; "and I was not present at any meeting to-night. As for being in the jockey ring, I have only heard faint rumours of it."

"Jack," said Dalton, "I've always placed implicit confidence in you. Tell me, as a friend, why you went there to-night, and I will promise you to make it all right with Sir William, and yet tell him nothing of what you say."

"I cannot, Mr. Dalton, I cannot," said Jack, in a bitter tone of regret. "Believe me, sir, I am honest. I would never betray your confidence, or the confidence of anyone who employed me."

"I believe you," said Dalton; "but I am afraid Sir William will be hard to convince."

"If you believe in me, sir, I don't care if he does not give me the mount on Blue Blood. I would sooner have your good opinion than that of any man in the world," said Jack.

"Thanks, Jack. You've always deserved it, so

far, mind you do so in the future. I believe what you say now, and trust you as much as ever I did. I will speak to Sir William, but don't be downhearted if he does not see it in the same light as myself. Good night."

"Good night, sir," said Jack ; "and thank you for your trust in me."

"Ned, come upstairs. What on earth keeps you up until this hour of the night?" said Mrs. Dalton.

"All serene, Mag. I'm solving a difficult problem," he replied.

"Then solve it in your sleep," she replied.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT "THE DIAMONDS."

LADY MELISSA was in the power of a man who knew not what it was to honour another man's wife. Flushton was popular, as such men go; he mixed freely with the women of his world, and their innocent daughters. But it were better for a woman to die before she fell into such a man's power.

But Lady Melissa had one keen weapon she could turn against this man did she know it.

The basest nature generally has some spark of better feeling in it. That better spark in Flushton's nature was his admiration for the woman he had in his power. He loved Lady Melissa better than any woman he had ever met. He had loved her before she married Sir William, although, perhaps, he hardly knew it.

Hector Flushton had also thought much over his interview with Lady Melissa. The more he thought the less he could understand himself. He had meant to gain her at any cost, and now he hesitated.

He knew she would ask to see the proofs he had said he could show her. What Miss St. George had actually shown him was a copy of a certificate of the birth of a male child. He knew the names on it,

of course, or, more correctly speaking, the mother's name, but the man's name, which was the same surname, he had never heard of. Sir William Melissa was called away to Adelaide on business, and this was Lady Melissa's opportunity. She communicated with Hector Flushton, and a time was appointed to visit "The Diamonds." Flushton had some difficulty with Miss St. George, but he had at last overcome her scruples, and Bella Luscombe would be absent from the house when the interview was to take place.

Lady Melissa ordered her carriage, and drove to the theatre alone. This was strange, thought old Marks, the butler, but probably she would join a party there.

She remained in the theatre a short time, and then came out as though overcome with the heat.

She met Flushton, who assisted her down stairs, and very little notice was taken of them.

He had a private carriage at hand, and they drove direct to "The Diamonds."

On arriving at "The Diamonds" Hector Flushton handed her out and they went into the house. Presently Miss St. George entered, and Lady Melissa could not repress a slight shudder as she saw her. It did not escape the notice of the woman who held her secret. There was no need of an introduction. Lady Melissa said :

"Would you be kind enough to let me have a few moments alone with Miss St. George?"

"She takes it deuced cool," thought that lady.

Hector Flushton bowed, and went on to the

verandah, where he lit a cigar. He had no desire to be present at the interview.

"I believe, Miss St. George, you are in possession of some papers which belong to me?" said Lady Melissa, haughtily. "Would you allow me to see them?"

This was not the kind of tone Miss St. George had expected to be addressed in, and she resented it.

"Excuse me, Lady Melissa, I have no papers of yours. They were left to me by my mother."

"Let me see them?" said Lady Melissa.

"Why should I let you see them?" said Miss St. George.

Lady Melissa changed her manner.

"I ask it as a favour of one woman toward another," she said.

"Then I will show you them. Come with me," and Miss St. George led the way into her own room.

It was a luxurious room, and again Lady Melissa shuddered as she entered it. Miss St. George opened a drawer, and took out a small box.

"Lady Melissa, I will trust you to return me the contents as they are. Promise me that?" she said.

"I will," said Lady Melissa, and Miss St. George knew she meant it, and handed her the box and key.

Lady Melissa took it with trembling hands. She knew it. What feelings the sight of that small box conjured up. It was some minutes before she opened it. Miss St. George watched her steadily, and felt a peculiar feeling of uneasiness stealing over her. Her

desire for humiliating Lady Melissa seemed to have loosened its hold upon her.

With trembling hands Lady Melissa opened the box.

She lifted out a small chain and miniature. She gazed at it fondly, and tears started to her eyes. It was a picture of a curly-haired little lad, with bright blue eyes. It was the picture of such a lad as Hall Caine would have delighted to call "Little Sunlocks." A bonnie little fellow. You could almost see the merry twinkle in his childish eyes, and hear the half-broken words falling from his pretty lips. Not more than four years old.

"My God!" said the childless wife of Sir William Melissa, and her proud spirit seemed broken.

She heeded not the presence of Miss St. George. She forgot she was there. Her whole being was wrapped up in the innocent childish face before her.

That heart-broken cry, "My God!" had pierced the other woman's heart. Somewhere, deep down in the dulled feelings, her sinful life had left her, Miss St. George found the remnants of a better woman, a girl as she had been in former days. She could not tear herself away. She felt fascinated. Lady Melissa had cast a spell over her, and she waited.

Sir William's wife was filled with bitter thoughts. A mighty self-reproach had risen up in her heart. Where was that child now? Sixteen years ago she had cried with delight over those little curly babyish locks. She had fondled them with a mother's tender

caress ; she had kissed them, and they had felt in her hands softer than any silks she had ever possessed.

And that was sixteen years ago.

The papers lay in the box. The papers she had come to buy, at any cost. The papers which held the story of her life, and were in another woman's hands.

She heeded them not. Hector Flushton, husband, position, fear, danger, disgrace, were all lost in one sad remembrance, the bitter recollection of wrongs done to the child, whose miniature lay before her.

"My God! where is he now?" she moaned.

And the other woman looked at her, and big tears stood in her eyes.

Was this Madge St. George who had vowed Lady Melissa should be humbled in the dust, and that she should not take Hector Flushton from her?

There had never been such a scene in "The Diamonds" as this before.

There had been tears of rage, but never such tears as those shed in Madge St. George's room.

"Where is he now? My little angel," said Lady Melissa, looking still at the miniature.

"No harm could befall a child like that," said Miss St. George.

Lady Melissa looked up: she had forgotten the presence of another woman. It recalled her to a sense of where she was, but at the same time she saw the change that had come over Miss St. George.

"Tell me. Where is the boy?" said Lady Melissa.

"I do not know," said Madge.

"Is—is he dead?" faltered Lady Melissa.

"I do not know," was the answer.

Lady Melissa rose from her seat.

"What has become of that child?" she said, as she took Miss St. George by the wrist.

"Oh! Lady Melissa, don't speak like that, I cannot bear it. I am a bad woman, I know, but I would give all I possess to find out what became of little Jack."

"Did I not leave him in your mother's care?" asked Lady Melissa.

"Yes, but he ran away when quite a little chap. When you did not come to see him after your marriage with Sir William he pined and fretted and one day he ran away," said Miss St. George.

"Were you kind to him?" said Lady Melissa.

"Perhaps not so kind as we might have been," said Miss St. George.

"And your mother died?" said Lady Melissa.

"Yes," said Florrie, with a sob.

"Perhaps it was better he ran away," said Lady Melissa. It was cruel, but she could not help saying it.

Miss St. George was somewhat nettled at this remark, and in her old manner said: "It's not for you to call up memories like that. You are not perfect, Lady Melissa."

"Forgive me," said Lady Melissa. "I beg your pardon. I should not have said that."

"Those papers are yours, Lady Melissa," said Miss St. George.

"Mine! Do you mean to tell me I can take those papers?"

"You can," said Miss St. George. "All of them."

"And you——?" asked Lady Melissa.

"I will not take anything but your thanks, Lady Melissa. I did that lad a wrong. I will try and find him for you."

"I must find him," said Lady Melissa, "if only to help him as an unknown friend. It is very generous of you to give me these papers. What can I do in return for them?"

Miss St. George blushed as she said: "Do not tell Hector Flushton you have them."

"I promise you I will not tell him," she said. "Give me your hand. If ever you are in need of a friend send for me. No matter when or where, I will help you."

"I will not forget, Lady Melissa. I feel a better woman now. It was that innocent child's picture did this," said Miss St. George.

Lady Melissa took the papers and the miniature, carefully folded them and placed them in the bosom of her dress.

"I must go now," she said.

"With Hector Flushton?" said Miss St. George.

"Yes. It is necessary," said Lady Melissa.

"I can trust you?" asked Madge.

"Implicitly," said Lady Melissa. "I will do all I can for you."

"Ah! here you are. I fancied you were never coming," said Flushton, as Lady Melissa appeared.

"I am ready to go," she said, quietly.

"Then go we will. This is no place for you," he said.

She made no answer and stepped into the carriage.

As Hector Flushton and Lady Melissa drove to the theatre the former said just before they reached the stopping place :

"You saw the papers, Lady Melissa ?"

"I did," she replied.

"What I said was correct ? I made no mistake ?"

"You did not."

"And I know the lady perfectly well ?"

"You do," she replied.

"Then we perfectly understand each other ?" he asked.

"Perfectly, Mr. Flushton," she said.

"And I may call and see you soon ?" he said, eagerly.

"Whenever you choose," she replied.

Lady Melissa reached home safely and locked the precious papers and miniature in a secret drawer in her escreteire.

As she turned the miniature key she said in a triumphant tone :

"You may call whenever you like, Hector Flushton ; I shall be quite ready to receive you."

CHAPTER XX.

JACK'S VISIT TO SIR WILLIAM.

ACTING on Dalton's advice Jack determined to lose no time, but to have it out with Sir William at once.

He meant to decline to ride Blue Blood before Sir William had the chance of taking him off, if he found the baronet was ill-disposed toward him.

Having determined to see Sir William, he asked Dalton to arrange the matter for him, and the trainer had done so. The meeting was to be at Sir William's house, and at the appointed hour thither Jack went.

Jack was admitted to Sir William's study and told to wait.

He looked around and found many things to interest him. The pictures of well-known horses on the wall, and the general air of "sport" about the room took his fancy.

He had not to wait long.

Sir William opened the door and came into the room. He seemed worried and anxious about something. Had he received any more letters?

"Well, Jack, you want to see me, Dalton says. What is the matter?"

"That is what I wish to know," said Jack.

"Indeed! Pray what have you come here for?" asked Sir William.

"Did not Mr. Dalton explain?" said Jack.

"No," replied Sir William. "He merely said you desired to see me on important business. What is it?"

"Permit me to ask you a question first, Sir William."

Sir William Melissa nodded.

"What did you think when you met me at the Brightside Inn?" asked Jack.

"Nothing particular," said Sir William. "But I confess I thought it strange you were there with those jockeys." He did not like to tell Jockey Jack he had received a letter informing him he (Jack) would be there on that particular night.

"Have I not quite as much right to go there, Sir William, as other jockeys?" asked Jack.

"Quite. But what has that got to do with your visit here?" asked Sir William.

"Mr. Dalton says you mistrust me," said Jack. "I will never ride for anyone who cannot trust me. If you think I'm not honest, then I decline to ride your horses." Jack said this firmly but respectfully, and Sir William was taken aback.

"You won't ride my horses? Come, that's good. Perhaps you'll wait until you're asked."

"You gave me to understand I was to have the mount on Blue Blood," said Jack.

"Did I? Well, I've changed my mind," said Sir William.

Jack's hopes were dashed to the ground, but he showed no sign of what he felt as he said :

"So have I, Sir William. I told you I declined to ride your horses. If you cannot trust me I shall have to find someone who can. I am glad to say Mr. Dalton has implicit confidence in me."

"If you're straight," said Sir William, "why did you go to that jockeys' meeting at the Brightside?"

"I knew of no jockeys' meeting when I went there," said Jack. "I went to meet someone who unfortunately did not turn up."

"Oh," said Sir William, sneeringly, "I suppose you'll tell me next you don't know there's a jockey ring formed, and the men in it pull horses and sell races, eh?"

"I certainly do not know of anything of the kind," said Jack, "except what Mr. Dalton has told me. Do you think, Sir William, I am a member of that ring, if it exists?" he asked.

"What else can I think?" said Sir William. "I knew the jockey ring met there that night, and I thought I would find out if possible who were in it. I saw you there. That looks suspicious."

"Appearances may be against me," said Jack, "but I swear to you, Sir William, I knew nothing of any meeting that night; nor was I present at any."

"Tell me what you went there for then, and I will believe you," said Sir William.

Jack knew that would come, but he had determined not to answer at all hazards.

"I cannot tell you that, Sir William. It is a secret

which concerns some one very near and dear to me, and I must keep it."

"That's unfortunate," said Sir William. "It would be so easy for you to put matters right."

"I wish I could," said Jack. "Some day, Sir William, I may be able to tell you why I went to the Brightside Inn that night, and also give you ample proof. In the meantime I must keep silent upon the subject."

"Then I am afraid we shall not have much to do with each other," said Sir William. "I will tell you frankly, Jack, I took a great liking to you. I have been so often 'had' that I am becoming suspicious. I am sorry if I wrong you, but until you can tell me why you went to the Brightside I cannot let you ride for me. You must see it yourself."

"I see what you mean, Sir William. If I were in your own rank of life you would probably trust me if I denied being a member of the jockey ring. As I am a nobody, without even a name, you wish for proof. There is no more to be said on the subject. I hope you will get a good man to ride Blue Blood," said Jack.

"Come, think the matter over," said Sir William. "If you will tell me why you went to the Brightside before the meeting I will give you the mount."

"I cannot do that, and it is no use giving me time to think the matter over," said Jack. "Nothing can induce me to alter my decision in that respect."

"I am sorry it is so," said Sir William. "But it is just as well we have had this conversation. We understand each other now."

He rang the bell, and Marks answered it.

"Show this gentleman out," said Sir William.
"Good day, Jack."

"Good day, Sir William," said Jack, as he left the room.

Now butlers have their peculiarities as well as other people. Marks had a weakness for horseracing, and had his "bit on" at times.

When he heard Sir William say, "Good day, Jack," he at once jumped to the conclusion this was Jockey Jack, of whom Marks, as well as other people, had heard so much of late. The opportunity of getting the straight tip from a real jockey was too much for old Marks. As he conducted Jack to the door he said, mysteriously, "Anything good for the Newmarket, sir?"

Jack could not forbear a smile as he glanced good-humouredly into Marks's face, in which eagerness was depicted in every feature.

"Surely you don't bet?" said Jack, half-jokingly.

"Not much of course," said Marks, "But we do like to have our bit on in the servants' hall, and we don't care about losing."

"That's it, is it?" said Jack. "Well, I think Sir William's horse has a big show."

"For the Newmarket?" said Marks.

"For both Newmarket and Cup," said Jack.

"But he can't stay," said Marks, looking very wise.

Jack laughed, and said: "Of course, if you know he can't stay, don't back him for the long race."

"I've heard he can't," said Marks.

"On good authority?" asked Jack.

"The best," said Marks.

"Whose?" asked Jack.

"Why, 'Reindeer' in the *Sporting Skit* says Blue Blood hasn't a hundred to one show in the Australian Cup, but might run well in the Newmarket," said Marks.

"Then you take Mr. Reindeer's advice?" said Jack.

"I'd rather take yours," said Marks.

"Then I'd sooner take fifty to one than lay a hundred to one about Blue Blood, even for the Australian Cup," said Jack.

"You ride, don't you?" said Marks.

"No," said Jack, so emphatically that it fairly shut old Marks up.

"Marks, has Sir William gone out?"

"What a sweet," voice thought Jack.

It was Lady Melissa, who was about half way down the staircase when she saw Marks and Jack, who had their backs to her.

"No, my lady. He's in the study," replied Marks.

Jack had now turned round, and as he looked Lady Melissa in the face he thought he had never seen such a beautiful woman.

The light fell full on Jockey Jack's face, lighting up his open countenance, blue honest eyes, and almost golden hair.

Lady Melissa looked at him for one moment. Such a look! Then her face changed suddenly, and across it flashed a pained, hunted, half fearful look. Then he saw her shapely form sway. He saw her clutch at the banisters, and then——

Well he hardly knew what had happened, but the

next moment he was helping old Marks to raise her ladyship from the hall floor. She had fallen head-long down the stairs in a dead faint.

Sir William rushed out of his study as he heard the noise.

Marks hurriedly explained what had happened, and Sir William seemed much agitated.

Jockey Jack offered to ride for the doctor at once, and Sir William thanked him and told him where to go.

The worthy doctor on his arrival found Lady Melissa lying on her bed quite unconscious, and blood slowly trickling from a wound in her temple.

"A dangerous fall," he said, when he had heard the particulars. "It is a mercy she was not killed. Has she been subject to fits, Sir William?"

"No," he said; "I never knew her to have a fit, or even faint."

"Then there must have been some sudden shock to her system. A healthy, strong woman like that would never have fallen so suddenly without her mind giving way for a moment."

"There could have been no sudden shock," said Sir William. "There was only Marks and Jack in the hall."

"Who's Jack?" said the doctor.

"Merely a jockey, one of Dalton's lads. They call him 'Jockey Jack,'" said Sir William.

"Then he could have had nothing to do with it," said the doctor. "It's very strange; I can't make it out. She is certainly more alarmed than hurt, I should say. The wound is not dangerous, although

it might have been so. She will probably be quite conscious of all that is going on when she comes round."

"There is no immediate danger, doctor?" said Sir William.

"None," was the reply. "I will stay until she recovers from her swoon. Perfect quiet when she comes round will be the best for her."

Sir William left the room.

Jockey Jack had gone when he reached the hall.

"Marks," he said, "did you notice Lady Melissa before she fell?"

"No, Sir William. She merely said 'Marks, has Sir William gone out,' and I said 'You were in the study,' when she fell down like one struck by lightning."

"It's very strange," thought Sir William, as he re-entered his study. "Well, I'm glad there's no danger. Poor Nora, I wish she loved me a little more," he sighed.

Lady Melissa was not long before she regained her senses.

When she did so she put her hand to her head, and muttered :

"What has happened? Where am I?"

"You're quite safe now, Lady Melissa," said the kind voice of the doctor; "you have had a fall. You fainted. You will soon be well."

She looked at him, and said :

"Where is he? Has he gone?"

He thought she meant her husband, and replied :

"Sir William is in his study, I think, shall I call him?"

She seemed to recollect herself as she said, "No, not now. Tell him I am well again. Tell him I fainted, that I have not been strong for some time. Pray relieve his mind," she said, earnestly.

"I will, Lady Melissa."

Her maid was present, and he left the room.

Lady Melissa lay quite still, and her maid bathed her head. Presently she said:

"Mabel, send Marks here."

The maid seemed surprised, but did as she was requested.

"Marks, who was with you in the hall when I fainted?" she asked.

"Only the lad they call Jockey Jack, my lady," he replied.

Lady Melissa heaved a deep sigh, as she motioned Marks to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONLY A MINIATURE.

LADY MELISSA'S illness was not of long duration. By the doctor's orders she remained in her room a week, and was then pronounced convalescent.

Lady Melissa sat in her room in deep thought. She had retired for the night, and Sir William, who had a separate apartment, had not yet returned from his club.

After she had dismissed her maid, she lounged in a comfortable chair in her dressing-gown, and seemed wrapt in thought. "It must be true," she said to herself. "I saw the likeness at once. It seemed as though a face had come back to me from the grave. When he turned round and faced me I felt I must scream aloud. It was a merciful dispensation of Providence I fainted, or Heaven knows what would have happened. Let me look again. I cannot be mistaken."

She rose from her chair and opened her cabinet. She took the box she had received from Miss St. George, unlocked it, and took out the small miniature it contained. Then she put the box carefully back in its place, and taking the picture with her, sat down again.

She looked at it long and earnestly. How her heart yearned towards the little cherub. It was only

a miniature, and yet she would not have parted with it for the world. "I cannot be mistaken," she said, "he is the living image of this child. I should have known him by my feelings alone, without this confirmation."

She bent down and wept over the miniature of that curly-haired boy. Bitter tears she shed. Had the ladies of society, who cordially hated her, seen her proud head bowed and the hot tears flowing, even their desire for revenge would have been satiated.

What could she do? She was surrounded with dangers on every side. True, no one knew of the discovery she had made but herself. She never for one moment doubted Jockey Jack as the curly-haired lad whose miniature lay in her lap, and whom she had abandoned to his fate. It was some consolation for her to know he no longer wanted help, but was in a position to maintain himself honourably.

He was at Dalton's. She had heard Sir William speak of Hettie Dalton. Then there was Blue Blood there. She made up her mind she would ask Sir William to take her to see the horse the next time he went there. She would probably see Jockey Jack again, and she could then make assurance doubly sure that she had made no mistake. That would be the best plan. She might, perhaps, have a chat with Hettie, and learn how she felt disposed towards him. This terrible suspense was more than she could bear. She had very little doubt as to Jack's identity, but she wished to be in a position not to doubt at all. How could she possibly reveal herself to him even if he proved to be her son? What

would he think of her? How could he love or respect a mother who had abandoned him almost in infancy? He would hate her, and turn from her, and that would make her lot still harder to bear. No, she must let matters take their course. Again she looked at the miniature, and the childish face seemed to give her courage.

She sat up late into the night, and when she had locked the picture up in its hiding-place she could not sleep for thinking of what might have been had she acted differently.

If she had told Sir William he would, no doubt, have accepted the responsibility of the child, and she could have proved to him there was no disgrace attached to it.

They had no children. Would Sir William adopt a child now? He might, but she felt he would never acknowledge a son in such a position as Jockey Jack. He was proud and would consider it a degradation. Yet why should he?

And so her ladyship lay awake the live long night, and never closed her eyes until morning was breaking.

Jockey Jack, when he returned to Dalton's, had related what had happened at Sir William's to the trainer. He commenced with the interview, and finished with the sudden faint of Lady Melissa.

Dalton was not at all surprised at Sir William's decision. He knew beforehand what it would be. Still he thought there might have been some hope of Jack either confessing why he went to the Brightside Inn, or of Sir William accepting his simple denial of any connection with the jockey ring. As for Lady Melissa's fainting fit, he thought very little about it

at all, excepting that he was sorry it had occurred. When Jack saw Hettie alone, as he often did now, he told her also what had taken place.

Hettie was very indignant at Sir William doubting Jack. Then she asked with a woman's curiosity,—

"You will tell me, Jack, why you went to the Brightside Inn, won't you?"

Jack was troubled. He did not like to deny her request, which was reasonable enough, but he felt he had no option but to do so.

"Hettie, you must not ask me to tell you now," he said, earnestly, "why I went there. Some day I may be able to tell you. At present my lips are sealed."

Hettie pouted, and said it was very hard he should have secrets from her, but after soothing her and promising she should be the first to know, she gave way.

"And what did you think of Lady Melissa?" asked Hettie.

"I thought her the most beautiful woman I had ever seen!" said candid Jack.

This remark showed how ignorant Jack was of woman's nature. He should, as a matter of course, have added, "excepting yourself, Hettie dear." He did not do so, however, and the young lady fired up again. Hettie had evidently a high spirit. Perhaps it was because she had been reared in an atmosphere of high-mettled thoroughbreds.

"Indeed," she said, "I am glad you think she is so beautiful."

"Such a lovely face!" said innocent Jack, quite unaware of the storm he was raising. "Such eyes, and such lovely hair! Hettie, have you ever seen her?"

"No, and I don't want," said Hettie. "You seem to have made pretty good use of your eyes during the short time you saw her!"

"I couldn't help it," said Jack. "She seemed to fascinate me."

"And I suppose you fascinated her so much that her feelings gave way under the pressure and she fainted?" said Hettie. "Quite romantic, to be sure. Lady Melissa fascinated by the remarkably handsome Jockey Jack!"

"Hettie," said Jack, "you're talking nonsense!"

"No, I'm not. You have been fascinated by her—you said so yourself. You said she had lovely eyes, beautiful lips, sweet dimples, and lovely hair!"

"Hettie, I said nothing of the kind," said Jack.

"Yes, you did," said Hettie.

"Don't be foolish," said Jack; "what on earth does it matter if I admired Lady Melissa? Any man would admire her."

"She's a great lady," said Hettie, "and great ladies take peculiar fancies. Now, I shouldn't at all wonder if she came here just to see you, out of curiosity."

"You're talking nonsense," said Jack. "Hettie, I believe you're jealous," he laughed.

"Not a bit of it," she said, with a toss of her head. "Jealous, indeed! You're a nice sort of companion to be jealous of!"

"Hettie, you know I love you," said Jack. "Don't be so ridiculous. I merely admired Lady Melissa as a beautiful woman, and I never spoke a word to her in my life. She is not half so lovely in my eyes as you, dear, and no other woman ever can be."

Jack drew her towards him, and Hettie did not resist. She nestled close against him, and said :

"Jack, dear, she is a great lady, and you are a fashionable jockey. Great ladies pet fashionable jockeys. But you love me, don't you, Jack?"

"Better than all the world," he said. They were standing together near the garden fence shaded by a dense mass of creepers. Ned Dalton had approached unawares, and they had not heard him, but he heard Hettie's last words and Jack's reply. Now Ned Dalton was not often astonished, but on the present occasion he certainly was. He hesitated a moment, and it was as well he did so. His first impulse was to cuff Jack soundly, and send Hettie into the house. That soon passed. Dalton had taken a most extraordinary liking to Jack, and it flashed across his mind that after all he was not a bad fellow. But Hettie. He could not think of it. She was good enough for a duke at the very least.

Contrary to what might have been expected, Dalton went away and left Hettie and Jack together.

When she entered the house he called her into his room.

"Well, dad, what is it?" she asked.

"Hettie, you've been making a fool of yourself!" he said, quietly.

Hettie blushed crimson. She knew her secret had been discovered. She was not at all sorry, for she loved Jack dearly. She did not answer him.

"I don't choose to have my daughter flirting with my stable lads," he said.

Hettie fired up. Jockey Jack a stable lad! "I don't flirt with stable lads, father. You ought to be

ashamed of yourself. If you alluded to Jack, I love him, and what's more we're engaged!" And she stamped her pretty foot in a temper.

Dalton chuckled quietly to himself. He rather liked this outburst.

"I'd not give a cuss for young 'uns without a bit of go in 'em," he thought.

"So you've settled it all, have you?" he said. "Well, all I can say is, I'll settle it all over again to-morrow, and Jack can clear out as soon as he likes," he said.

"If he goes I'll go with him—if he'll take me," said Miss Hettie.

"Will you?" said Dalton. "We'll see about that."

"Oh, father, I do love him so!" said Hettie, and she put her arm round Dalton's neck and hid her face on his shoulder. "Don't send him away, dad. It's all my fault. I did it all, dad. He said he must not think of it, and he thought of you, father. Indeed he did."

"He thought a good deal more of my daughter, I'll bet," said Dalton. He could never resist Hettie, and after all he liked Jack. Then he said :

"What'll your mother say?"

Hettie's face fell. She looked up coaxingly at Dalton, and said :

"You can tell her about it, father. She'll consent if you do."

"Consent, indeed! I've not consented. You're much too young to think about such things; besides, Jack's got to make a future yet."

"He'll soon do that," said Hettie, confidently.

"You know nothing about it," said Dalton.

They had half an hour's further conversation, and then Hettie left with a bright merry face.

"Send Jockey Jack away? I don't part with lads like that in a hurry. But he can't have my gal till he's at the top of the tree."

He "tackled" his wife, as he called it, that night.

Mrs. Dalton was adamant. She would hear of no such thing.

"Then you'll lose a daughter, and I'll lose a d—— good jockey!" said Dalton.

"Ned, you're an ass!" was the uncomplimentary retort.

"Probably," said Dalton, with a yawn; "but sometimes when you pull an ass's ears he kicks."

"Rubbish!" said Mrs. Dalton, "our Hettie's free to marry anyone."

"Precisely what I told her," said Dalton. "She did not seem to care about that at all.

"I never heard of such a thing," said Mrs. Dalton. "Why, Mr. Flushton——"

"Flushton be—be—be—dashed!" said Dalton. "He's a blackguard."

"He's not," said Mrs. Dalton; "and he's very fond of Hettie, I am sure."

"I'd sooner see her dead than the wife of such a man," said Dalton. "Jack's worth a score of him. She shall marry who she likes. I've said it and I mean it."

Mrs. Dalton knew her husband's temper well.

She said no more that night, but she secretly vowed Jockey Jack should not have Hettie if she could help it.

CHAPTER XXII.

BLUE BLOOD HOLDS A RECEPTION.

"NORA, I've decided to let Blake have the mount on Blue Blood," said Sir William to Lady Melissa.

"Indeed," she said, somewhat surprised. "I fancied Jockey Jack was to ride, but, of course, you know best."

Then Sir William told her of the interview he had had with Jack, and of his refusal to say why he went to the Brightside Inn.

Lady Melissa listened attentively to what he had to say, and when he had concluded, said: "So you think that a sufficient reason for taking this jockey off."

"Rather. He's in the ring with the rest of them," said Sir William.

"Are you sure Blake is not?" she asked.

Sir William hesitated. He had his doubts about Blake, but he did not like to own he was in the wrong when once he had made up his mind.

"No, I'm not sure, but then I'm certain about Jack."

"And yet the lad has a candid, open face," said Lady Melissa, musingly.

"You must have studied it attentively," said Sir

William, "and yet you had not much time to do it in."

She blushed and replied, hastily: "I certainly only just caught a glimpse of him, but that was sufficient to form some sort of an opinion."

"I'm going over to see Dalton to-day," said Sir William, "and finally settle this business."

"May I go with you?" she asked.

He looked surprised, but said:

"Certainly, if you wish it, Nora."

She did not, as a rule, take much interest in horses, and he thought it strange she should do so now.

As Sir William and Lady Melissa drove up to Dalton's door, Hettie saw them from the window and thought:

"There, I told Jack she'd come. It's too bad. What creatures these fashionable ladies are."

But when Hettie had seen Lady Melissa and talked with her for a few minutes, all her distrust vanished, and instead of disliking her ladyship she had to confess she was charmed with her.

Dalton personally conducted them to Blue Blood's box, and although Jack was not to ride him, he had not as yet relinquished his charge of the horse. He was in the box ready to strip off the clothing and show his pet to the visitors.

"Bring him out, Jack," said Dalton.

He did so, and Blue Blood came forth to be admired.

"He's a beautiful creature," said Lady Melissa, as she patted the sleek shining neck of their New-market favourite. "If looks go for anything he should win, William. He does you credit, Dalton."

"Don't give me all the credit, your ladyship," said Dalton. "Jack's done more for him than I have. He's devoted to the horse."

Lady Melissa stood close to Jockey Jack, and she looked him straight in the face. How her heart beat. If she had any doubts before, she had none now.

"He's fit, Dalton," said Sir William. "I'll put another commission on the market this week."

"As you please, Sir William," said Dalton, "but I hear Percussion is sure to win, and as he has beaten St. Almo twice in his trials he must be hard to beat."

"I'll risk it," replied Sir William. "I feel pretty confident this time, Dalton."

"I should be more confident but for one thing," replied Dalton.

"What is that?" asked Lady Melissa.

"Sir William has decided to take Jockey Jack off and give Blake the mount. That is the reason, my lady," he replied.

"I've good reasons for doing so, Dalton," said Sir William. "If Jack will answer the question I put to him the other night, I will let him ride Blue Blood with pleasure."

He looked at Jack as he spoke, and the jockey replied: "I cannot tell you, Sir William."

"Please tell him," said Lady Melissa. "I should like to see you win the race."

It was hard to resist that voice, but Jack said:

"If I could tell Sir William, my lady, I would do so. I cannot. But I can tell him this, that if he let's me ride Blue Blood, I think I could win the race on him, and I would try my best to do so."

"I am sure you would," said Lady Melissa, and Hettie, who was present, could have hugged her for those words.

"You don't understand these matters, Nora," said Sir William.

"Perhaps not," she replied. "But I am a pretty good judge of faces, and I think Jockey Jack's is an honest one."

Nothing more was said at the time, and the party went into Dalton's house.

Mrs. Dalton had made some slight preparation for the visitors, and then disappeared. She "could not face Lady Melissa," she said, afterwards.

So it happened that while Sir William and Dalton went to talk over the matter of jockeys, Lady Melissa and Hettie were left together.

Lady Melissa took a fancy to Hettie at once.

"You must call and see me sometimes, Hettie," said Lady Melissa. "It would be a change for you, and you would be company for me. I am very dull."

Lady Melissa dull! Could it be possible?

Hettie replied:

"I shall be pleased to accept your invitation, Lady Melissa, and it is very kind of you to ask me, but I should never have thought you could be dull. You must have so much to occupy your time, and so many means of amusing yourself."

"You are mistaken, Hettie. I am dreadfully dull. I don't care much for society people. But you seem happy and contented, Hettie."

"Oh, yes, I am very happy," said Hettie.

"How refreshingly innocent she is," she thought. "I thought young ladies, Hettie, were only very happy when they had almost secured a partner for life. Is that your case—but I ought not to ask such a question?"

Hettie blushed furiously, as she replied :

"I don't mind you asking me, Lady Melissa. I am——, I am——"

"Engaged?" said Lady Melissa.

Hettie nodded, and then said :

"But you must not tell anyone. It's a great secret."

"I hope your father and mother know and approve, Hettie," said Lady Melissa ; "beware of taking any false step, you may repent it all your life."

"Father approves," said Hettie ; "and he'll talk mother over. You see mother has somewhat exalted notions of what I ought to be. She fancies I ought to marry a duke at the least, and turns up her nose at the bare idea of a jockey for a son-in-law."

"So your lover is a jockey?" said Lady Melissa then, suddenly. "Not Jockey Jack, is it, Hettie?"

Hettie blushed again, and looked acquiescence. Then she was startled, and discovered that Lady Melissa had suddenly come over to her and kissed her, and said :

"Bless you, my child. I'm sure he's a good lad. You can count upon me to be a friend to you both."

"You are very kind," said Hettie, overwhelmed. She hardly knew what to think. Lady Melissa

appeared to take an unaccountable interest in Jockey Jack.

"I wish you could get Sir William to let Jack ride Blue Blood, Lady Melissa," she said. "He has set his heart upon it. It's cruel of Sir William to doubt him. I don't, and he would not even tell me why he went to the Brightside Inn."

"Then it must be a great secret," said Lady Melissa, with a smile. "You may rely upon me, Hettie, I will do all I can to induce Sir William to change his mind. I am afraid I shall not succeed, but I will do my best."

While Hettie and Lady Melissa were chatting in one room, Dalton and Sir William were having it out in another.

"It's no good, Dalton; I shall not change my mind. I saw Jockey Jack at the Brightside Inn with the jockeys, and I know they're in the ring, the whole lot of them."

"Are you certain Jack knew what they were there for?" said Dalton.

"Of course. What else could he have been there for, but to join them, if he had not already done so," said Sir William.

"Have you ever found him dishonest?" asked Dalton.

"No," said Sir William; "but he has never had such big game as a mount on Blue Blood to deal with."

"I always trust a man until I find him out," said Dalton.

"But that might lose us the Newmarket," said Sir William.

"That is your opinion, Sir William, but it is not mine. I am your trainer. All I have to do is to send your horse, fit and well, to the post. You can choose your own jockey. But if you will accept my advice, you will give Jockey Jack the mount, as you intended."

"Has he told you why he went to the Brightside? If he has and you're satisfied I will let him have the mount."

"No, he has not told me," said Dalton; "but I would trust him for all that."

"You are prejudiced in his favour," said Sir William.

"Perhaps I may be," said Dalton. "I can't say I'm prejudiced in Blake's favour."

"Blake is a good jockey," said Sir William.

"The other one is a better," said Dalton. "Blake is too great a mate of Flushton's for me to fancy him much."

"I've made up my mind, Dalton, and win or lose, Blake has the mount. We won't speak of it again unless Jockey Jack is willing to tell me the reason he went to the Brightside Inn. If he does then Blake shall have fifty to console him for standing down, and Jack can have the mount at any moment."

"Very well, Sir William, I will tell him what you say."

When Sir William and Lady Melissa reached home she said to him:

"What a nice girl Hettie Dalton is. I've asked her to call and see me. She tells me she is engaged to Jockey Jack."

"Oh," said Sir William. "So that's the reason Dalton is so partial to the fellow."

"It shows Dalton's good sense. William, you'll let that lad ride Blue Blood, will you not?" she said coaxingly.

"No," he said, emphatically.

"Now I have had a good look at the lad I feel sure he is honest," she said. "Take my advice for once, William, I don't often ask you to listen to me."

"What on earth can it matter to you, Nora?" he said. "You seem to have taken a most unaccountable interest in this lad."

She blushed and then went very white. He saw it and wondered still more.

"It is not the lad I take such an interest in, William, but Hettie Dalton. She loves Jockey Jack, and although she has asked him why he went to the Inn on that particular night he will not tell her. Cannot you see, William, that if she trusts him you might do so."

"No, I can't," he said, obstinately. "Hettie Dalton is, no doubt, over head and ears in love, and consequently quite capable of making a fool of herself. Once and for all I say he shall not have the mount unless he tells me why he went to the Brightside Inn. If he will do that he can have it with pleasure, and Miss Hettie can convey the joyful tidings to him."

"He will not do that," said Lady Melissa. "Be generous, William, and trust him."

"And lose the race?" he replied. "Oh dear no."

Generosity may be too lavishly displayed, and this is a case in point."

She saw it was useless to argue further with him, so retired.

Sir William was put out, nay more, he was cross.

In this frame of mind he drove into the city. At the Victorian Club he found speculation on the Newmarket was brisk.

Percussion was a firm favourite, but St. Almo was also nibbled at occasionally at good odds. Blue Blood was a marketable commodity at 100's to 5.

Sir William did not bet. He went to his club, where he met several friends. Now champagne is not likely to soothe the excitable part of a man unless he takes so much of it that he lapses into a state of blissful slumber.

Sir William cracked two or three bottles, played a couple of games at billiards, then threw up his cue and went back to the Victorian Club. Why he returned he could not very well have given a reason for. That he returned to some purpose may be gathered from the following paragraph, which Ned Dalton read in the *Argus* next morning:

"Last night there was some sensational wagering at the Victorian Club over the Newmarket Handicap. Percussion was heavily supported and ruled favourite until the well-known baronet, Sir William Melissa, entered the room somewhat late in the evening. As most people are aware, he is the owner of Blue Blood, a much fancied Newmarket candidate. Several tempting offers were thrown out to

him to back his horse. Sir William seemed disinclined to bet, but all at once he turned round in the room, and said loud enough for all to hear: 'What's the largest wager I can have against my horse at 100's to 5.' There was silence for a moment, and then a well-known layer said: 'I'll lay you 5,000 to 250, Sir William.' 'No more?' was the quiet answer. 'Yes, £10,000 to £500 if you like, Sir William, against Blue Blood.' 'Done,' said the baronet, and the bet was booked. Then came the rush. Sir William must have backed his horse to win fully £30,000, and when the rooms closed Blue Blood was a firm favourite at 6 to 1. It was also stated on the authority of Sir William that Blake would ride the horse."

Dalton threw down the paper, and, as he did so, said:

"He must have been a bit off. The wagers are all right, but I don't half like that Blake business. There's some roguery at work. I'd give a hundred to hear he'd changed his mind, and given the mount to Jockey Jack."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHO'S TO WIN.

BLAKE had been told by Dalton he must consider himself as engaged to ride Blue Blood. Blake was jubilant. He saw the means of making a pile open to him, and he meant to take advantage of it.

It was Thursday night before the Newmarket day, and a curious party had assembled at the Brightside Inn.

The two Cases were there, Toddy Blake, Reuben Potter the bookmaker, and several well-known jockeys, whose names need not be mentioned. They were in Peter Flowers's private room, and it was quite evident the business they were discussing was of a most important character. It was apparent Toddy Blake was an interested party, and Potter appeared to direct his remarks specially to Blue Blood's jockey.

"To put the matter plainly," said Potter, "we have to decide who's to win if we can. We've got the principal mounts in the race on our side, and I think we ought to have no difficulty in arriving at a decision as far as we are concerned. Blake rides Blue Blood, and says he can win. I say we don't want Blue Blood to win."

A general chorus of assent, in which Blake did not join.

"What am I to get out of this?" said Blake. "I ride the favourite, and he can win. It's not likely I'm going to throw such a chance away for nothing."

"You get a big share of the spoil," said Potter. "If the favourite's safe see what money I can lay against him."

"What'll win if Blue Blood doesn't?" said Blake.

"Lambton's mount, Percussion," said Potter. "It's a dead bird."

Blake's heart gave a big jump.

"But Lambton's not here," he said; "how do we know he'll ride square?"

"Because it's worth his while," said Potter. "I've put his money on, and know he's safe. Besides, the stable have laid him a good stake to nothing."

Blake began to see his way clear. He'd make a big haul. He'd back Percussion again. It looked, as Potter said, a good thing.

"Are you quite sure St. Almo's no chance?" said Blake; "he used to be a good 'un."

"I ride him, and he hasn't a ghost of a show," said Tom Case.

"You ride him?" said Blake. "That's all right, then."

It will be seen that a nice little game of cross purposes was being played at the Brightside Inn. Honour among thieves, indeed. It was very evident there was not much honour towards each other among this party. It was a case of self all round, and each jockey seemed to fancy the other was attempting to "do him."

The meeting was prolonged until a late hour, when

it was finally decided all the jockeys present were to ride in the interests of Percussion.

"You'll have to make the running on St. Almo," said Blake to Tom Case as they left the room.

"You bet I'll keep a clear passage for Percussion if possible," said Tom, with a grin.

He thought "Yes, Toddy, my boy, I'll make the pace so hot with St. Almo they'll never catch me."

The brothers Case and Reuben Potter stood to win a heavy stake over St. Almo, and the money was on at long odds.

Potter had actually induced Hector Flushton to give him the commission to lay off the St. Almo money, and back Percussion. The wily bookmaker had laid the St. Almo money to himself, and laid the Percussion money to Hector Flushton also on his own account.

Mr. Flushton, it will be observed, had a good deal to learn, although he considered himself very clever indeed at the game.

Before Tom Case left the Brightside Inn he had a few minutes' private conversation with Lily Flowers.

He had not told her anything which could betray the secret he was possessed of, but he had given her to understand that he would put a "fiver" on his mount for her, just for luck.

"But St. Almo's no chance?" said Lily; "why not put it me on Percussion. That's your stable horse, is it not?"

"Yes," said Tom; "Percussion goes for the stable, but I'll put you the money on my mount, or not at all. Shouldn't you like to see me win?"

"Of course I should, Tom," she said ; "do as you like but you've no chance of success."

When Tom Case had gone Lily Flowers thought over what he had said.

She had been accustomed to associate with men of his class, and knew most moves on the racing board. She was well aware Tom Case would not throw a "fiver" away on a horse he thought had no chance, even if it happened to be his own mount. Something was in the wind, of that she felt quite sure, but it was too deep and well laid a scheme for her to fathom.

Now, it so happened that Ned Dalton looked in at the Brightside Inn on the Friday morning, and he saw Lily Flowers.

"Is your father in?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Dalton, he's gone into Melbourne," she said. "Can I do anything for you?"

Dalton hesitated a minute or two, and then looking her straight in the face, said :

"Was Blake here last night?"

"Yes," said Lily, without the least hesitation.

"Was Mr. Flushton here?" asked Dalton.

"No," replied Lily.

Dalton appeared satisfied. Strange though it may appear, Dalton seemed to distrust Flushton more than a "jockey ring," although he fancied such a thing existed.

"Was Blake here long?" he asked.

"Not particularly long," said Lily ; "why do you ask, Mr. Dalton?"

"Because Sir William Melissa has given him the

mount on Blue Blood, and I don't want a chance thrown away," he replied.

"Why doesn't Jockey Jack ride?" said Lily.

"I wish he did," said Dalton; "but Sir William doubts him because he won't tell him why he came to your house on a particular night."

"If Sir William doubts Jockey Jack he's making a mistake," said Lily; "I'm sure he's honest."

"So am I," said Dalton; "I'd give fifty notes to have Jack up on Blue Blood to-morrow."

"Why?" said Lily, surprised. "Fifty notes. That's a pile."

"Not more than it's worth. I don't half like Blake," said Dalton.

"No more do I," said Lily. "But he'll never throw a chance of winning such a race as the New-market away."

"I don't say he will," replied Dalton; "but Blue Blood's a peculiar horse, and he's taken a fancy to Jack, which is pounds in favour of his having the mount."

"Well, I wish I could help you, Mr. Dalton, but I can't. I don't know why Jockey Jack came here except that he appeared to be waiting for someone who did not come. He pulled out a letter to read while he was here."

"Whew!" said Dalton. "That's it, I'll bet. It's a put up job. Sir William came here because he got a letter. I'd give another fifty to know who wrote 'em. One person wrote 'em both, I'll bet. It can't be helped though, Sir William's made up his mind, and that settles it."

"What do you think will win, Mr. Dalton?" said Lily.

"Fancy Blue Blood, but I'm not so sanguine with Blake up. Percussion must run well if he can beat St. Almo as they say, and the market indicates," said Dalton, as he went towards the door.

"I'm going to back St. Almo," said Lily.

"Eh?" said Dalton, stopping.

"I'm going to back St. Almo, or rather he's to be backed for me," she replied.

Ned Dalton smiled. Then he nodded to Miss Lily Flowers, said "good morning," and went away.

"He's a cool hand," thought Lily, "but he's the best trainer we have here by a long way."

"Now, what on earth has put St. Almo into her head," said Dalton. "There's some infernal game at work here. I wonder if Marlow's made a mistake. Not the first by a long way, if he has. Percussion's trials were all right, if my information's correct. Why the devil can't Sir William trust Jockey Jack? I'll have another try at him."

Dalton did have another try. He went to Sir William's the same afternoon, but found him as obstinate as ever on the point.

"Then I'll tell you what it is, Sir William," said Dalton, "you'll lose the race."

"Why?" asked Sir William.

"Because Blue Blood is such a peculiar horse, he'll never do his best with Blake up," said Dalton.

"Then I'll lose," said Sir William, quietly. "I've said Jockey Jack shan't have the mount unless he

tells me why he went to the Brightside Inn that particular night."

Dalton went home in no enviable frame of mind. He had a talk with Jockey Jack, but found him still determined not to comply with Sir William's request.

"You're an obstinate pair," said Dalton, "and between you we shall lose the race. I've a presentiment we shall get done."

"I wish I could tell him," said Jack, "but I cannot."

"Well, Jockey, so you see I ride Blue Blood after all," said Blake.

"Yes," said Jack, "and mind you ride him straight. You bet I'll watch you and so will the boss."

"Let's drop that," said Blake. "Can Blue Blood win?"

"Yes," said Jack. "I think he can. Get him well off and you'll have no trouble."

Toddy Blake had a good think over the coming race, and had he not backed Percussion he might have gone straight. As it was, he determined to watch Lambton's mount closely, and if he found Percussion could not win, go for the race on Blue Blood. He knew Sir William would come down handsomely if he won, and that the gift he would receive would more than cover his losses on Percussion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NEWMARKET.

THE horses were taken down to Flemington, and already the course was thronged, and the lawn and hill filled with an eager crowd. Not such a concourse of people as may be seen on Melbourne Cup day, but a very respectable assemblage, nevertheless.

No fault could be found with the condition of the favourite. His coat shone like satin, and his powerful muscles were clearly defined. Not too light, but just trained to run to the hour.

Sir William Melissa came to have a last look at his horse before the race.

He saw Jockey Jack and said as he stood looking at him, for a few moments :

"I'm sorry you have lost the mount on Blue Blood, Jack. If you will tell me now what took you to the Brightside Inn that night you shall ride him, and I will pay Blake well to stand down."

Reuben Potter would have shivered with dread had he thought his chances of a fortune hung on Jockey Jack's answer to this remark of Sir William's.

Jack merely replied :

"I wish I had the mount, Sir William. If you cannot trust me I am sorry, but it is impossible for me to tell you what you ask."

Sir William said nothing more, but moved on through the throng of people and spoke to Dalton, who was then engaged in putting the finishing touches to Blue Blood's toilet. Blake came across the paddock in the canary jacket and green cap so familiar to all the racing men.

Then it became generally known that Toddy Blake was to ride and not Jockey Jack.

Meantime in the ring the betting had been fluctuating considerably. There appeared to be a decided tone of uncertainty about the market, and horses went up and down in the betting in the most remarkable manner.

Blue Blood held his own fairly well, but when it was definitely known that Blake was to ride he eased somewhat in the market. Percussion was heavily backed, and Hector Flushton, now the stable money was on, made no secret of his opinion of the horse's chance. Several of his friends, who knew him well, doubted the genuineness of his remarks, for Hector Flushton was not a man to give away many good racing tips.

A quarter of an hour before the time to start St. Almo came with a rattle into the market. He seemed to be heavily backed, and although the bookmakers at first laid him freely, they became suspicious as the money kept rolling in.

"Look here, Mr. Flushton, don't play any of your double games with me," said a heavy gambler, when Flushton had told him Percussion was the correct thing to back.

"If you play me false, you'll rue it, I can tell you.

This St. Almo's in your stable, and I want to know whose backing the horse?"

"Whose backing him?" said Flushton. "Blest if I know. Whoever they are they'll lose their money. Didn't I tell you all about the trial, and haven't you put a pot of money for us on Percussion? What else do you want?"

"Of course if you say it's all right, Mr. Flushton, it's no concern of mine, but I can tell you it looks d—— funny, and people will talk. Are you quite sure your jockeys are all right?"

"Lambton rides Percussion, and that's quite enough," said Flushton. "He's had it made worth his while to win, so you need have no fear on that score. The only one we fear is Blue Blood, and as Toddy Blake rides, I don't fancy there's much danger in that quarter. I know Toddy well. Meet him at 'The Diamonds,' and so on. He won't trouble us much, I fancy, at the finish."

The bookmaker smiled as he said:

"If Toddy Blake is an acquaintance of yours, Mr. Flushton, I wouldn't give much for Dalton's chance of winning the Newmarket."

Marlow was puzzled at the place St. Almo occupied in the betting, but he knew it must be all right as regards Percussion.

As the horses filed out, and took their preliminary canter, Dalton said to Jack:

"Come with me and watch the race, my lad. I wish we had you on Blue Blood, but never mind, Sir William will find out when the race is over he made a mistake, and he'll acknowledge it, or I don't know him."

Blue Blood, with Blake in the saddle, went along with a swinging stride that at once ensured confidence in his backers. Percussion had heaps of admirers, and was next in demand to Sir William's horse. There were thirty starters, and about twenty were well backed. St. Almo had gone back in the market at the finish, and the books now offered twenty-five to one against him in vain. There were many good judges of horses who had a moderate amount on him at that price, for there could be no mistaking his good looks.

"They are a pretty good lot," said Sir William to a friend who stood at his side.

"Yes, they are, but yours looks as well as any of them. I hope he'll win, for I backed St. Almo for a good stake before I found out Percussion was Marlow's best, and then I went on your's for a saver."

"I've an idea," said Sir William, "that after all St. Almo may beat Percussion, but Marlow should certainly know best. With Lambton up it looks odds on Percussion beating the other one."

Marlow and Hector Flushton stood together, eagerly watching the horses, and it was evident they were somewhat excited over the result.

Reuben Potter had a smile on his face, suggestive of the utmost confidence, and it was with the most tranquil spirit he heard himself called a "fool" as he booked two hundred to eight about St. Almo. The thirty horses were now fairly in line at the end of the straight, and after a couple of false starts the flag dropped.

The first to break the line was an outsider never

mentioned in the betting. Then the colours of Blue Blood showed out well in the centre, and St. Almo was close up with Sir William's horse. Lambton was not far behind, and at the end of a furlong the field had lengthened out considerably.

The pace was a cracker, and, as Dalton looked through his glasses, he saw Blake had got a firm hold of Blue Blood, and Percussion had come up alongside him.

"As I expected," he muttered. "Blake should come right away if he can, and it looks as if he could to me."

Down the straight they came, and the crowd commenced to shout and roar, and that peculiar babel of sound when each man fancies the horse he has backed is winning, was heard all over the course.

An exclamation of surprise from Marlow made Flushton start.

"What is it?" he asked, anxiously. "Percussion's going well?"

"Yes," said Marlow, "and so is St. Almo. Just you look at him. Curse that fellow Case, why can't he take a pull at him?"

"He's all right," said Flushton. "He's clearing the way for Percussion."

The distance post is reached, and at this point Tom Case lets St. Almo have his head. The horse, full of running, responds, and shoots to the front.

A roar from the crowd proclaims the fact, and Hector Flushton turns pale, while Reuben Potter smiles blandly.

Blake, who has been riding Blue Blood strictly to

orders—not Dalton's—wonders what is about to happen. He suddenly feels there must be something wrong in the universe, and that the world has turned upside down. He looks at Lambton, and sees in that jockey's face a look of intense surprise. Then, as though it had suddenly dawned upon them both that they had been "had," they sit down and ride their best.

But St. Almo had stolen a march, and got a good start.

Tom Case feels he has the race as good as won, and looks back to see where the others are.

Blue Blood gradually wears Percussion down, and goes in pursuit of the leader. Alas! for Toddy Blake. He knows he has kept that run until too late. He feels he has been made a dupe, and a cat's-paw. He knows now he could have won had he been honest, and netted a nice stake, instead of losing one. He urges Blue Blood to his utmost speed, and stride upon stride he draws nearer St. Almo.

It is an exciting finish. Although the favourite gamely answers to every call, the magnificent run comes too late, and Tom Case, riding St. Almo all he knows, passed the judge's box half a length ahead of Blue Blood, while Percussion comes in with the crowd.

Marlow and Hector Flushton were white with rage. They felt they had been done, but how? It never for one moment dawned upon them they could have been deceived in the trial. No, they fancied Lambton must have sold them. Worse than

all their friends congratulated them on the win, said it had been worked very cleverly, and so on, and all the time they had lost hundreds of pounds. Others upbraided them for being put on the wrong horse, and taking it all round they had a most unenviable time of it.

Jockey Jack saw Sir William Melissa after the race, as he stood talking the affair over with Dalton.

"I was wrong after all, Jack," said Sir William ; "I ought to have let you have the mount, it serves me right. Dalton has been trying to persuade me to let Blue Blood start for the Australian Cup. I don't fancy he has any chance, for he has never run well over a distance. If you like to have the mount on him I'll start him. It will be a poor recompense for taking you off in the Newmarket, but that was more your fault than mine."

Jack's eyes glistened. He was to have a mount on Blue Blood in a big race after all.

"Thank you, Sir William," he said ; "I shall be very glad to ride him, and I think he will run better than you expect."

"My opinion, too," said Dalton ; "leave him in, Sir William, and he might effect a surprise."

"As you like," said Sir William. "He can run for the Australian Cup, and Jockey Jack can have the mount."

CHAPTER XXV.

WE'VE BEEN SOLD !

MARLOW had a stormy interview with Tom Case, and he did not get the better of it. He openly accused the jockey of pulling St. Almo in the trials at Caulfield, and although he had denied it, he did so in a half-hearted kind of way, and at the conclusion said :

"If you don't think I rode square, I'll leave your stable. I've done a lot of dirty work for you, and I'm dashed if I'll do any more. I can tell some nice tales about your horses, so you'd better not say too much about me. I backed St. Almo, if that's any consolation to you, and so did my brother, and we won a fair stake. You see, when I'm let alone I always ride to win," said Tom, with a grin.

"You're a pair of scoundrels!" said Marlow ; "and the sooner you clear out of this the better I shall like it. I'll take good care your character's well known, and I don't fancy you will get many more mounts."

"We've been sold !" said Marlow to Flushton.

"No doubt about it. That —— lad, Case, pulled St. Almo in the trial. What a certainty it was ! but, by Jove ! if Blake had come sooner with Blue Blood

we should have had to put up with second place, I fancy."

"I always said St. Almo was the better horse," growled Flushton; "but you would have your own way. You see what's come of it. I'm about cleaned out."

"I thought you said you had a good thing to fall back upon," said Marlow.

"So I have. That's my business. We don't share in it. It's not a racing transaction," snarled Flushton.

"Blackmailing, then, I'll bet," grumbled Marlow.

"Take care! You may go too far," said Flushton.

"Not with you, I think," said Marlow. "I know you pretty well. Some of your transactions wouldn't bear much light being thrown upon them."

"Well, it's no use quarrelling," said Flushton. "We shall have to make the best of it. Do you know who is the biggest winner over St. Almo?"

"No," replied Marlow.

"Reuben Potter," said Flushton.

"He must have been in league with those lads," said Marlow.

"No doubt about it," said Flushton. "They've had a nice haul."

"Curse them!" said Marlow. "By —, I'll be even with them yet. I'll have revenge on Reuben Potter if I swing for it!"

The trainer's countenance bore such a fiendish malignant expression that Hector Flushton turned pale as he said:

"For Heaven's sake, Marlow, no violence. You look fierce enough to kill the fellow!"

"I'd like to shoot him as I would a dog!" said Marlow. "Look at all the good things he has stood in at with us, and then to go back on us like this! If he were here now, and we could keep it dark, Reuben Potter would not enjoy much of his winnings!"

"If you talk like that I'll wash my hands of you," said Flushton. "We've lost the race, and been done all round, but it will only make matters a thousand times worse to take revenge in that way. No, it won't do, Marlow. Drop that game, or I'll not go in with you again."

"How are we to pay him back?" said Marlow. "I tell you I'll be revenged on him. Potter shall know what it is to tamper with lads of mine!"

"We'll find out a way to get at him," said Flushton; "but it's no good using violence."

Meeting Reuben Potter casually in the street, Marlow said to him:

"I hear you had a big win over St. Almo. I'd like to know where you got your information from. What induced you to back him?"

"That's my business," said Potter. "I won a fair stake, and managed to get on the right one in your stable for once in a way."

"You've been in at a lot of our good things," said Marlow, "and I don't think you have behaved square in this business. It's a conspiracy, that's what it is, and, by Jove! I'll make you pay for this before I've done with you!"

Potter laughed. "Do what you like, my friend,"

he said, "but recollect the law reaches pretty far, and you'd have a bad time if you got into its clutches. Take my advice, Marlow. You've been licked at your own game, and you had better make the best of it."

The Monday night after the Newmarket Handicap did not differ materially from any other night.

It was past midnight when Potter left his club, and with none too steady steps proceeded on his way home. He had won a considerable sum of money, and his luck certainly seemed dead in. He pulled out his watch and looked at it for a few moments.

"Nearly one o'clock," he muttered ; "dashed if I see a cab about anywhere. Hate walking home nights like this. If I met Marlow now it would be a lark. I'd shake every bone in his body. He looked precious glum at the club, and so did his pal, Flushton. Well, it's no business of mine if they did lose their money."

Potter walked on, and passed the Princess Theatre and went into the park.

"Short cut," he said, "think I'll have a rest."

He sat down on one of the seats, pulled out his pipe and commenced to smoke. He remained there a few minutes when a policeman came along, and he evidently knew the bookmaker.

"What, is it you, Mr. Potter?" he said, in a surprised tone. "This is not a very safe place at this time of night. You'd better get home. Let me go part of the way with you ; it's on my beat."

"All serene," said Reuben, as he staggered to his feet ; "fact is, I've been having a night of it. Won

some money and got a little more champagne than was good for me. Such things will happen, you know."

"Hold up, sir," said the policeman, as Reuben stumbled; "you're not very steady on your legs, but I think they will carry you home, now you have got so far."

"Been a pretty useful pair," said Potter. "I don't want to dissolve partnership with 'em yet. What's that?"

"What's what?" said the constable.

"There, don't you see something," said Potter, pointing to a few bushes at one side of them.

"There's nothing there, Mr. Potter," said the constable, as he thought to himself, "he's got the D's sure enough. I think I ought to see him home."

"Fancied I saw a man there," said Potter.

"It was all fancy, sir. There's no one about," said the constable.

"I'm all right now," said Potter. "It's not far to my place."

The constable hesitated, as he said:

"You're sure you're all right now, Mr. Potter."

"You bet. I'll be home in ten minutes. Good night."

"Good night," said the constable, as he watched him walk away. "He'll get home right enough now. It's not more than a quarter of a mile to his house."

He went back again through the park and resumed his monotonous round. The clocks chimed the hours, and the constable listened. Three o'clock,

"Only three more hours," he said. "Beastly cold night. Shall be glad when I'm off duty at six."

He stopped short, and listened. He fancied he heard someone running along the street, and drew back in the shadow of a doorway.

No, he must have been mistaken. He looked out, but it was too dark for him to see far, although the lamp threw a dull glare around where he stood. He drew back again quickly. There was no mistake about it this time. He could hear the footsteps, but now the individual, whoever he was, must be sauntering leisurely along.

The constable walked in the direction in which the person was coming.

In a few moments he was face to face with a man he fancied he had seen before.

"You're out late," he said.

"Yes. I'm an early bird, ain't I? You see us poor beggars has to get up very early in the morning to make a bit before breakfast. I'm hungry now, you bet, and have been prowling around for the last hour, just to keep warm."

"Which way did you come?" said the constable.

"Right along there," said the man, pointing in the direction Reuben Potter had gone.

"I think I have seen you before?" said the constable.

"Daresay you have, mate. I've been away from here for some years, but I've had no luck. Been at all sorts of games since I went Sydney way. Roving about the world don't seem to suit my constitution."

"What's your name?" said the constable.

"That's pretty cool," was the unabashed reply.
"I'm not ashamed of it. My name's——"

"Well, what is it?" said the constable impatiently.

"Don't be in such a hurry, mister. I don't fancy I've got a card about me," said the man, as he fumbled in his ragged waistcoat.

"None of your nonsense with me," said the constable. "You've no business roaming about the streets at this hour of the morning. If you won't tell me your name, I'll find you a comfortable apartment until its daylight, when you can explain matters in the court."

"It's very hard a decent honest man can't walk the streets without being run in for doing nothing."

"How do I know your honest?" said the constable.

"How do you know I ain't?" retorted the man.

"Come, give me an account of yourself, and I'll let you go," said the constable, in a more friendly tone.

"My name's Bob Tomlin, and I have been a sailor, a horse coper, a lumper, and heaps of other things, but there's one thing I've never been."

"What's that?" said the constable.

"A loafer," said Bob Tomlin.

The constable laughed, as he said:

"And I hope you never will be. Don't get into trouble, and take my advice, don't roam about the streets at this hour of a morning, it may get you into hot water."

"You're not a bad sort for a còpper," said Bob, as

he tramped on his way. He had not gone many steps, when he turned round and shouted :

"Say, constable."

The constable halted, and said :

"What is it?"

Bob walked slowly back to him.

"I've thought of something else," said Bob. "Just before I met you, a man went past me, running like mad, and cut across yonder park place. He did give me a start, and I just caught a glimpse of his face. He was pale as a ghost, and looked scared-like."

"Curious," thought the constable. "I fancied I heard someone running."

"Thanks," he said to Bob. "I'll look round."

Bob went on his way whistling, and the constable resumed his march.

"Wonder what the deuce that fellow had been up to, running like that. Must be something wrong about him, or he'd never want to get over the ground so fast."

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him, and he walked rapidly along the road Reuben Potter had taken a couple of hours before.

It was a shade lighter now, and as he reached Potter's house he looked around carefully.

"All seemed quiet and still. The house was not a pretentious one, but comfortable. There was a garden in front, and the verandah was covered with creepers, and in addition to this, trellis work had been fixed up.

This obscured the verandah from the road, and the constable, to make sure all was right, opened the

gate and walked quietly on the grass up to the steps.

Everything looked in proper order, and he was about to go away, when seated in a chair, at the far end of the verandah, he saw the dim outline of a man's figure."

"Must be Potter," he thought. "Perhaps he sat down and went to sleep there. He must have been bad to do that."

He went up to the recumbent figure, and then saw his surmise was correct.

It was Reuben Potter fast asleep, with a handkerchief over his face.

The constable shook him by the shoulder, and said:

"Come, Mr. Potter, get up. You'll catch your death of cold here."

No answer.

"He sleeps soundly," thought the constable, and shook him again. The motion caused the handkerchief to fall from Potter's face.

The constable looked at him with a gaze of horror, as the dim light shone faintly on the face.

There could be no mistaking the meaning of those staring eyeballs, nearly starting from their sockets. The livid features were distorted, and the face was horrible to look upon.

Reuben Potter was dead, strangled, while asleep in the chair in which the constable found him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

REUBEN POTTER'S MYSTERIOUS DEATH.

WHEN Constable Lee found Reuben Potter dead in his verandah chair, he hesitated what to do, but in a few moments he recovered his self-possession.

He then cut the rope which had been placed round the unfortunate man's neck, and saw a deep blue-black mark round the throat.

"Was Potter quite dead?" thought Constable Lee.

He roused the household, and after their first shock of horror was over, sent one of the inmates for a doctor while he remained with the body.

The medical men speedily arrived, and at once made an examination of the dead man.

"Curious case this," he muttered. "No signs of struggling, and yet the man has been strangled, without a doubt. Never met with such an extraordinary affair. How did you find him, Constable?"

The constable related what had induced him to go back to Potter's house, and then stated how he had found him dead in the chair.

"Take the body into the house," said the doctor. This was done, and an inspector of police sent for.

Constable Lee then examined carefully the garden

and verandah, but found no traces of anyone having been about the premises. Not even a footmark to guide him, and nothing appeared to have been left either on or near the verandah.

Potter's clothes were not disturbed, but no money was found on him, and his watch and chain, which the constable noticed he had on when he met him, were gone.

Robbery then must have been the reason for attacking Potter, and the murderer or murderers must have known he had a sum of money in his possession worth taking.

Who had done it? What could have been the motive? Robbery probably, or perhaps revenge.

When Hector Flushton heard the news he seemed dazed, and unable to comprehend the fact.

"Impossible!" he said. "Why, I saw him at the club after midnight, and he left saying he would get a cab and go straight home."

Flushton was oppressed with a terrible doubt. "Had Marlow done this deed? No, the man would hardly have the courage for it, and to do it single-handed. He would see him at once and have it out."

He did see Marlow, and when the trainer heard Reuben Potter was dead his face turned white as death, and he would have fallen had not Flushton caught him by the arm.

"You never heard of it until now?" said Flushton. "Why, man, it's in everyone's mouth. Where have you been? Where did you go after you left the club last night?" asked Flushton.

Marlow had recovered himself sufficiently to gasp out he missed his train, and had to stay in Melbourne all night.

"Where did you stay?" said Flushton.

Marlow appeared to hesitate, and Flushton made a gesture of impatience.

"Come, out with it!" he said.

"I went to the Federal Coffee Palace and got a bed there," said Marlow.

Hector Flushton looked incredulous as he said:

"What on earth made you go there? I never heard of you patronizing that establishment before."

"It was handy to the station," said Marlow.

"So it was," said Flushton. "I never thought of that."

"Where the d——l do you think I was last night? From your manner you might imagine I had a hand in this Reuben Potter business," said Marlow, with a sneer.

"I can think what I like," said Flushton. "If you were at the Federal you couldn't have been at Potter's, that's certain. I'm glad you can account for your whereabouts in any case."

"Why?" said Marlow, somewhat alarmed.

"Because you had a bit of a row with Potter at the club last night, and the police are sure to make inquiries there. Then you left about ten minutes after Potter, and that might be put down as suspicious. The police might fancy you followed him to have it out. Of course I shan't breathe a word about the affair, nor say I have seen you, but I thought it best to give you a hint."

"Has anyone said anything about my little affair with Potter at the club?" asked Marlow.

"Not that I know of," said Flushton; "but it is sure to be remarked upon sooner or later."

"I'll go there now," said Marlow; "and see what's going on. I'm d—— if I want to be mixed up in the affair. It seems curious Potter should be murdered like this."

Marlow went to the club and found several members present who had been there the night before and heard the quarrel that had taken place between the trainer and Potter.

He fancied they eyed him curiously, and this nettled him, but he held his tongue.

"Terrible affair this murder of Potter's," said one of those present.

"Yes," said Marlow. "Poor beggar, I'm sorry for him, although he was no friend of mine."

"Robbed too," said the man; "not a copper found on him, and his watch and chain gone."

"Somebody must have known he had coin on him, at any rate," said Marlow. "He'd a fair haul here."

"But how should any of the ordinary thieves know he had money on him?"

"Oh, a man like Potter is generally supposed to have a fair amount of money in his pocket," said Marlow.

He remained long enough at the club to hear sundry whispers as to his quarrel with Potter, and he did not feel quite at his ease about the affair.

The best detectives were employed in the case,

and Constable Lee was eager to obtain a clue, and he felt he should possibly get one if he could find Bob Tomlin, the mysterious man who had volunteered the information about some person running past him with a scared white face.

Marlow's quarrel with Potter had been found out without much trouble, but as yet the police had very little evidence against him. He had been questioned as to where he had spent the night of the murder, and it was found he had taken a bed as stated at the Federal Coffee Palace. This seemed conclusive evidence that he could have had nothing to do with Potter's murder. * * * *

Sir William Melissa had been true to his word, and Blake had to stand down. Dalton had considerable faith in Blue Blood's powers, but, like Sir William, he hardly fancied he could get the two miles and a quarter.

Although Marlow had been beaten at his own game, he was no fool, and when he heard Jockey Jack was to ride Blue Blood instead of Blake, he knew that Dalton must have considered the Newmarket was not a fairly run race.

"I wonder what Blake thinks of it?" he said to himself; "I'll try and find him, and see. He ought to know what Blue Blood can do, and so ought I, but I'm blest after that Newmarket business if I know anything."

Finding Blake seemed a difficult matter. Marlow hunted high and low, but to no purpose. At last he made a virtue of necessity, and asked Dalton if he knew where "Toddy" was to be found.

Dalton seemed in no wise surprised at the question. He never was much surprised at anything. He told Marlow Blake had not shown up at Hairbell Cottage since Saturday night.

Marlow turned away, and thinking Blake must have got "on the loose," he troubled himself no more about him.

Jockey Jack had weighed out, and as he crossed the paddock he encountered Marlow.

"Got a chance, Jack?" said that worthy.

"A horse like Blue Blood must have a chance. You ought to know that," said Jack.

"He can't stay. Don't flatter yourself you can win," said Marlow.

"If you know all about it what did you ask my opinion for?" said Jack, and he walked on.

"He might have a chance for all that; I think I'll put a bit on," said Marlow.

As he went into the ring he happened to turn round, and saw a man near him whose face seemed familiar. At first he could not think where he had seen him before, but it suddenly dawned upon him he had met him at the club that morning.

"Hang the fellow, he's following me," thought Marlow. "What can he want. Not Potter's affair, surely? Look's a bit like a detective, too," and Marlow again felt a sudden feeling of uneasiness come over him.

He dodged about the crowd, but felt the man was still watching him. Whenever he turned his head he saw those piercing eyes fixed upon him, and they made him shudder. "It must be a terrible sensation

for a fellow to be dogged like this when he knows he has committed a crime," thought Marlow. "It's bad enough, now. Dash it all, I'll speak to the fellow."

He turned around with this intention, but looked in vain for this mysterious stranger.

"Not after me at all," thought Marlow; "what a deuced fool I am, to be sure. Well, I'm hanged if there isn't Toddy Blake, and he looks pretty tight, too."

It was Toddy Blake certainly, but he was changed in appearance. He had been drinking, and heavily. His eyes were blood-shot, and he had a slovenly, neglected appearance.

"Blake, you look a bit off," said Marlow. "Come and have a drink."

"I'm seedy enough," said Toddy. "Been having a spree since Saturday."

"And lost the mount on Blue Blood," said Marlow. "You're a fool."

"I'm not such a fool as you are!" said Blake. "What about St. Almo. Nice mess you made of it."

"Not more of a mess than you did," said Marlow.

"Oh, I'd a decent win," said Blake.

"Had you indeed?" said Marlow. "Who pays for it, then?"

"Reuben Potter, old boy," said Blake, hilariously.

"He can't know what's happened," thought Marlow. "You must be pretty drunk to tell me that, at any rate." Aloud he said:

"I'm afraid you won't get much from that quarter."

Blake looked amused. He was actually grinning at Marlow, and this aggravated the trainer.

"Don't grin like that, you drunken young beggar!" said Marlow, savagely. "Do you know Reuben Potter's dead—murdered?"

"Heard it on the course for the first time," said Blake, coolly.

"Then how the deuce can you get your money when the man's dead?" said Marlow.

"It's safe enough," said Blake. "You'll see on settling day."

"There'll be a heavy settling day for someone over that business," said Marlow.

"You're right," said Blake, "and it won't be long before you find it out."

CHAPTER XXVII. ¹

WHAT HAPPENED ON CUP DAY.

THE bustle and general confusion preliminary to the saddling-up of the candidates for a big race was over, and the horses had filed out on to the course to contest for the Australian Cup.

A well-known long-distance horse named Fairfield was favourite, and Longman, Easterling, Hesperence, Maud, Timber, and Dangerfield were all more or less fancied, while Blue Blood figured at the respectable odds of twenty to one.

There was not much delay at the post, and when the flag fell Jockey Jack, much to the surprise of Dalton and Sir William, sent Blue Blood away to the front.

"Bless me," muttered Dalton, "looks as if he was going for a six-furlong flutter, instead of a long race. What the deuce does he mean by it?"

More people than those immediately interested could not understand Jack's tactics, and smiled at what they deemed his folly and want of judgment.

"That's the fruits of putting up inexperienced men," said one, and "the lad's a born fool to cut out the pace," said another.

When six furlongs had been traversed it was seen

that Blue Blood seemed to hold a clear couple of lengths lead, and was going strong and well, while Easterling, Maud, Timber, and the favourite, Fairfield, were all close on his track.

Jack now eased his mount a little, and the others soon got level with him. Then out shot Blue Blood again, and once more made the pace a cracker.

"Seems to me he's making six-furlong spurts," thought Dalton. "By Jove! I believe the lad's right. He's humbugging the horse, that's what he's doing."

When a mile and a half had been traversed Jack again eased Blue Blood, and the favourite went to the front, followed by Timber and Maud, with Blue Blood close after them.

Five furlongs from home Fairfield led, and the excitement became great, as it was seen the favourite was still full of running.

Still Jack kept Blue Blood going, and he did not fall back, although there were many thought he was beaten, Sir William among the number.

Jack was commencing to think that after all Dalton was right, and Blue Blood would not stay it out. He had all along been endeavouring to make his mount imagine he was going for short spurts, and as Dalton had surmised he had "kidded" the horse to a certain extent.

He now shook Blue Blood up, and the horse responded gamely enough. At the distance he was only a length to the bad behind the favourite, and at the half-distance he had drawn level. A desperate battle now ensued, and Blue Blood's great turn of speed enabled him to wear Fairfield down, and hard

ridden by Jack he passed the judges' box a clear length to the good.

Jack felt elated over his victory, and had a glad happy smile on his face as he rode to weigh in.

Although Blue Blood was not heavily backed, the win was popular, and Jockey Jack was heartily cheered.

For the first time he knew what it was to ride the winner of a great race, and as the cheers resounded on all sides he thought it was worth undergoing a good many trials to be the hero of such a moment.

On all sides Jack was congratulated.

Sir William shook him by the hand, and heartily confessed he was sorry Jack had not ridden the horse in the Newmarket. "However," he said, "that cannot be helped now, and you shall have a couple of hundred pounds for your win."

Jack felt overwhelmed at such a proof of Sir William's kindness, but he was even more proud of his feat, when Dalton said :

"You rode a grand race, Jack. That was a clever ruse of yours with the horse. I know the beggar thought he was in for a good couple of sprints, and no more. You're a credit to me, Jack, and I knew you would be."

Marlow was surprised at the result of the race, despite his knowledge of Blue Blood, and he had not anticipated such a gallant victory. He was ruminating over the result, when he saw a slight disturbance had occurred near one of the refreshment bars, and he went over to see what had happened.

He there found Toddy Blake with a flushed face,

gesticulating violently to the crowd, and Marlow fancied he heard the name of Reuben Potter spoken.

This aroused his interest, and he went forward to see if he could assist Blake in any way, for he felt he might be useful to him afterwards.

Blake was, however, very far gone, and turned sharply on Marlow with a drunken exclamation to "mind his own business."

Marlow's temper being none of the best, he swore at Blake, and was about to move away when the jockey caught him by the coat.

"Leave go!" said Marlow.

"Shan't!" hiccuped Blake; "I know yer, I do. Oh, yes (hic), I know yer."

"Leave go, I say!" said Marlow, savagely. "D—— you, what are you up to?" he went on, as Blake became more violent.

"Here, we can't have this row!" said a quiet-looking man, with an air of authority. "Just you keep quiet, or you'll be put off the course, and keep still, whether you like it or not."

"Who're you?" said Blake.

Marlow looked steadily at the man who had spoken, and saw it was the same who had watched him, as he thought, before the race.

"Never mind who I am. Keep a civil tongue in your head, Blake," said the man.

"He's a detective," said someone in the crowd, and Blake caught the words.

"You're a detective, are you? Well go and look after Potter's case, and (hic) leave me alone."

"What do you know about Potter's case?" said Detective Hyam, as he caught hold of Blake's arm.

"Hands off!" said Blake.

"Take care of him," said Marlow. "You're in good hands, now, Toddy. You wouldn't let me help you out of this."

"Not much," said Blake, who appeared to have sobered up considerably. "I wouldn't be seen with you. Ask him what's been done with Potter, that's all!" growled Blake.

Marlow turned white, and ground his teeth with rage.

"You infernal scoundrel, I'll strangle you!" he hissed.

"You're used to strangling, ain't you?" said Blake.

Detective Hyam thought this was becoming interesting, but there was now a large crowd around, and he had a difficult task before him.

Marlow gave Blake a look of deadly hate, and seemed unable to control himself. He was turning away, when the detective said:

"Excuse me, Mr. Marlow, don't go away. What does this fellow mean?"

"I don't know. He's a drunken liar," said Marlow.

"I'm no more drunk than you were last night when you missed your train," said Blake.

"How do you know I missed the train?" said Marlow.

"Watched you, my boy, that's all. I'm very fond of you," said Blake.

Detective Hyam commenced to think Blake was

not so drunk as he pretended to be, but had he a purpose in it ?

Marlow raised his clenched fist as though he would strike Blake.

"Hit away!" jeered Blake ; "I know you, and what you are."

"What is he?" said Hyam, quietly.

"The man who made away with Potter," said Blake.

Marlow went pale as death. Such an accusation in such a place, even if untrue, would tell seriously against him.

"You infernal scoundrel, I'll make you pay for this!" said Marlow.

"It's true!" said Blake.

"It's a foul lie, and you know it," said Marlow.

"It's a serious accusation," said Detective Hyam. "I must detain you, Blake, to hear what more you've got to say on this subject, and I should advise you, Mr. Marlow, to go with me."

Marlow flatly refused. It would be an admission that he was concerned in the affair, he fancied.

"I say you had better come with me," said Hyam.

The crowd gathered round had spread the rumour that Marlow had been accused by Blake of being mixed up in the Potter murder, and Hector Flush-ton heard it.

He went across, and forced his way to where Marlow stood. He put his hand on Marlow's shoulder and said :

"What's all this nonsense, man? Don't excite yourself. Can't you see that young ass is drunk?"

"He's not so drunk as he appears to be, Mr. Flushton, but if you'll go bail Mr. Marlow appears to-morrow at the office I'll take your word for it."

"Certainly I will," said Flushton. "Come, Marlow, it's merely a matter of form, and you must comply with Detective Hyam's request."

Marlow growled an unwilling assent, and went away with Flushton, while Detective Hyam took charge of Blake.

Marlow sent a wire to Dalton at Hairbell Cottage as follows:

"Was Blake at your house on Monday night? Important. Reply."

He recollected Blake had said he had been on a spree, but he wished to ascertain whether what he had said was correct. In a short time he received the following reply:

"Blake not been seen here since Saturday night. DALTON."

Marlow gave a sigh of relief as he put the wire in his pocket.

"I'll make it hot for you, Master Toddy!" he said to himself. "I reckon, Mr. Blake, you'll wish you'd kept your mouth shut to-day before very many hours are over you."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BLAKE IN A FIX.

WHEN Toddy Blake found himself ensconced in the lock-up he commenced to feel decidedly uneasy, and thought perhaps after all it would have been better for him to have made no accusation against Marlow.

Next morning when Blake was brought before the court Marlow was in attendance, and also Hector Flushton. There was a considerable crowd of people present, for the scene at Flemington had excited no little curiosity.

Detective Hyam stated his case, and repeated almost word for word the accusation Blake had made against Marlow.

The Magistrate on the Bench looked surprised as he heard the story, for he had expected the case to be very simple. Now, however, matters had taken an unexpected turn, and he looked at Marlow to see how he took it.

"This is a serious charge you have brought against Mr. Marlow," he said, addressing Blake. "What reasons have you for making it?"

Blake evidently thought he had better stick to his story, for he replied in a dogged tone :

"It's true, and I don't see why a fellow should have been locked up all night for making it."

"You were locked up because you were not in a fit state to take care of yourself," said the Magistrate.

"I was all right," said Blake; "there were plenty worse than me on the course."

"Do you make a formal charge against Marlow in connection with Reuben Potter's death?" said the Magistrate.

"Yes, I do," said Blake.

"Mr. Marlow, what have you to say to this?" asked the Magistrate.

Marlow stepped forward quite coolly and said:

"May I ask Blake a question or two in reference to this absurd charge, your worship?"

"Certainly," was the reply.

"Where were you on Saturday night last?" asked Marlow.

Blake looked keenly at him and seemed somewhat confused, as he said:

"At Dalton's, of course. Where else should I have been?"

"Oh," said Marlow; "you're quite sure about that?"

"Of course I am," replied Blake.

Marlow took his pocket-book out of his coat, and taking Dalton's telegram read it carefully.

"Were you at Dalton's on Sunday and Monday nights?" he asked.

"What's that got to do with you!" said Blake. "I'm not responsible to you where I go, am I?"

"Answer the question," said the Magistrate.

Blake hesitated a moment, and then answered evasively :

"Where else should I have been ?"

Marlow handed the telegram in, and the Magistrate read it. He then said :

"This telegram, which is signed by Mr. Dalton, states you have not been seen at his place since Saturday night."

"Let me look at it," said Blake.

The telegram was handed to him, and he read it slowly.

"And suppose I wasn't at his place on Sunday and Monday nights?" said Blake.

"If you were not there, where were you?" asked Marlow.

"That's my business!" said Blake. "I suppose you'll say I was looking after Potter next?"

"More unlikely things," said Marlow. "You're pretty free at accusing other people of being mixed up in this affair."

"I know what I'm talking about," said Blake. "I can bring witnesses to prove where I was both on Sunday and Monday nights."

"But what made you bring this charge against Mr. Marlow?" said the Magistrate. "Can you substantiate it? It was a fearful accusation to make on mere hearsay. Are you willing to withdraw what you said, and say it was done under the influence of undue excitement?"

"Well, your worship, I was a 'bit on,' don't you see, and I may have said things I had no business to say. What made me think Marlow was mixed up

in the affair was because he and Potter were not on the best of terms, and I knew he had a grudge against Potter."

"Will you withdraw what you said?" asked Marlow.

"I may as well," said Blake, ungraciously.

Detective Hyam had watched the case with interest, and he felt certain Blake was concealing something. He quickly made up his mind that the best way to get at the bottom of the matter would be to let Blake go, and then watch him closely.

He spoke to the Magistrate, who said to Marlow :

"Are you satisfied with this withdrawal by Blake?"

"As he was drunk at the time he made it, I don't think it counts for much, your worship," said Marlow.

"That's my opinion," said the Magistrate, "and I should advise Blake to hold his tongue in the future, or he may get into serious trouble!"

Blake looked sulky, as he said :

"If Marlow had not aggravated me I should never have said what I did. He's no friend of mine, nor was he of Potter's."

The Magistrate fined Blake for the offence with which he was charged, and as he left the court the jockey looked considerably relieved.

Marlow followed him out, and said : "I've not done with you yet over this job, Blake !"

"You'd better let me alone," said Blake. "If you knew where I was on Monday night you wouldn't be so keen about kicking up a row with me !"

"Let the matter drop," said Flashton. "You

were a fool, Blake, for saying what you did. I expect you'll find Ned Dalton will have had about enough of you."

"He won't get the chance to tell me, because I shan't go back to him. I've got a better game than that on."

"You'll not get many mounts after fooling away that race on Blue Blood," said Flushton. "The horse could have won easily."

"Could he, indeed? Much you know about it," said Blake. "I shall get quite as much riding as I want."

"You're a decent jockey when you keep straight," said Flushton. "Patch it up with Marlow, and you may get a ride for our stable occasionally, and you know we have some pretty good things on now and then. You're no fool."

"Not fool enough to ride for Marlow's stable," said Blake.

"You're an obstinate beggar," said Flushton; "but have your own way. Perhaps, when you are down on your luck, you'll think twice before refusing such an offer."

"I'm not down on my luck, at present," said Blake, "and when I am, I shan't come and tell you."

Blake walked away, leaving Marlow and Flushton together.

"Have you any idea what made him bring that charge against you?" said Flushton.

"None whatever," said Marlow. "He's a drunken ass, and I never want to see him again."

Detective Hyam found the Reuben Potter case decidedly to his taste. There was an air of mystery about it he thoroughly enjoyed.

He had a long talk with Constable Lee over the affair, and when he had got the most minute details off by heart he felt he could work steadily at the case.

At present he had no definite clue. "We must find the fellow you spoke to that night, Lee. He will probably know what sort of man it was he saw rush past him."

Search was made high and low for Bob Tomlin, the name the strange man had given to Constable Lee, but he could not be found. He seemed to have disappeared suddenly from Melbourne, and this was most unfortunate for Detective Hyam.

He was not a man to be baffled by the disappearance of one man, or half a dozen men.

"I've been accustomed to men disappearing for years," he said. "What would be the use of detectives if men didn't disappear? I'll bottom this thing yet, but I confess it's about the rummiest job I ever came across."

For several weeks Detective Hyam hunted about for any clue which might lead him to get at Reuben's Potter's murderer, for he felt certain he should succeed in the end. He had watched Blake steadily. The jockey seemed to have plenty of money, and to be spending it freely at "The Diamonds" and elsewhere. This was not unusual on the part of a successful jockey, but Blake could not be placed in that category, and he had never won a big

enough stake to make what he would have termed a pile.

As Detective Hyam was walking down Bourke Street one morning he saw a hansom passing.

At a glance he recognized Blake as the occupant, and his quick eye took in at once the two portmanteaus in front.

"Hallo. What's up now?" he thought, "Blest if he isn't going on an excursion. My dear Blake, I must really find out where you are off to. I have quite a paternal interest in your welfare."

He hailed a cab, and gave the driver orders to follow the hansom in which Blake was riding.

"Going by boat, are you?" he thought, as the hansom turned in the direction of the wharves.

He watched Blake go on board the *Aramac*, and then inquired when and where the vessel was going.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon she was to start for Sydney and North Queensland.

"A trip up North would do me good, I think," said Hyam. "I'll make arrangements for it."

He went to the head office and reported how matters stood, and then went to his private residence.

Detective Hyam was a bachelor. He had an idea that a detective should always work single-handed, and he never could trust the opposite sex with secrets. His landlady knew his ways, and never interfered with him, although at times she was uncertain whether it was her lodger or some other individual who was in the house. Therefore when he bustled into the house and commenced to

pack up, his landlady took it all as a matter of course.

In half an hour he came downstairs, and as he passed out into the street the landlady said :

"Lawks! What men Mr. Hyam does bring into this house, and I never saw him go upstairs either."

The *Aramac* was making ready to start as a hansom drew up at the wharf.

A well-dressed, middle-aged man, with a kind, benevolent look about him, and an air of country innocence, came on board, and in soft, modulated tones asked to be shown his cabin.

Toddy Blake stood near him as he went past, and eyed him with a curious smile.

"Country bloke, I'll bet," he said to himself. "Might take him down if I could find a pal to take a hand at cards."

The "country bloke" sat down in his cabin, and made himself quite at home.

The steamer cast off, and Toddy Blake had started on his voyage to Sydney. He little dreamt Detective Hyam was on board, keeping a watchful eye on all his movements.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RETURNS TO OUR HERO.

ON all sides Jockey Jack was congratulated upon his clever riding of Blue Blood in the Australian Cup.

Blake's appearance in the Police Court and the strange accusation he had made against Marlow were naturally the subject of conversation in sporting circles. Dalton had given Blake to understand his services were no longer required, and that he thought was no doubt the reason of the jockey's departure for Sydney, where he would probably get another engagement.

The day after Blake sailed for Sydney Jockey Jack received another mysterious letter, written evidently by the same hand that had penned the epistle which took him to the Brightside Inn and caused him to lose the mount on Blue Blood in the Newmarket. He read it with eager interest, and seemed surprised at its contents, for they completely exonerated him from all blame imputed to him by Sir William. The letter read as follows :

“THE DIAMONDS.

“I have learnt since writing my last letter to you that I was made the unwilling instrument of doing you considerable injury. The letter I wrote to you, which caused you to lose the mount on Blue Blood in the Newmarket, was written at the instigation of Hector Flushton. When he told me what to write he explained sufficiently to make me believe what he

wished me to say would not injure you. A jockey in your stable named Blake has since explained why it was written, and I am deeply sorry for the wrong it did you. I now offer to make all the amends I can, which are greater than you imagine. Through a peculiar circumstance I have become possessed of a secret which concerns yourself and your mother. I know her name ; she is in Melbourne, and I will give it to you if you will meet me at Brighton Station at noon on Monday next. Why I select Brighton is that I wish to avoid notice from certain persons with whom I am acquainted. I assure you I am your friend, and what I have written is the truth.

“MADGE ST. GEORGE.”

Jack made up his mind to show the letters he had received to Ned Dalton, the man he knew was his best friend, and he took the first opportunity of doing so.

“Well, Jack, what is it, my lad ?” said Dalton, as he entered his comfortable room.

“I have received a letter to-day, which I wish to show you,” said Jack. “It is written by the person I received the letter from which caused me to go to the Brightside Inn. I can now show you that letter as well as this. Here they are,” and he handed them to Dalton, who said :

“I wish the second letter had arrived before the Newmarket. We should have won the double then, confound it ! By Jove ! I was right,” he ejaculated, as he glanced at the handwriting.

“About what ?” said Jack.

“This is the same handwriting as the letter written to Sir William. I felt sure of it.”

Dalton read the letters carefully, and then looking straight at Jack said :

“Do you know this woman at ‘The Diamonds ?’”

"No," said Jack, somewhat indignantly : "but I know Blake went there, because he told me so."

"I might have known you didn't go there," said Dalton. "Jack, this may be another trap to compromise you with a dangerous woman."

"I'll risk it," said Jack. "I must find out who and what my mother is. I shudder to think of what she may be when a woman like this says she is possessed of her secret."

"Perhaps you are right," said Dalton. "At all events, she cannot be very bad when she makes amends like this. What a precious scoundrel that Flushton is ! It was evidently a plot on their part to get you off Blue Blood in order to make Blake safe. They've been beaten at their own game from all I can hear, and the Cases won a lot of money over St. Almo. These letters must be shown to Sir William. They will completely exonerate you in his eyes, and you will never be taken off one of his horses again."

"Would it not be better to wait until I have seen this woman before he sees these letters ?" said Jack.

"I don't see what difference it can make," said Dalton. "I should show them to him at once. He must be put on his guard against Hector Flushton, who is, I believe, a constant visitor at his house, though why I cannot conceive."

"Perhaps, after all, it would be better to let Sir William see them without delay. His advice may be useful. I would rather you take him the letters, Mr. Dalton, if you do not mind," added Jack.

"Very well, my lad. I'm going to the club this afternoon, and I'll put them in my pocket. I shall

probably see Sir William there, and will take the opportunity of showing them to him," said Dalton.

"Thank you, sir," replied Jack. "You're the best friend I ever had, Mr. Dalton."

"And you're the best lad I ever had," replied the trainer; "and I hope you'll make me a good son-in-law."

This was a direct intimation to Jack that he might consider himself free to marry Hettie, and he left the room feeling happier than he had ever done in his life.

Ned Dalton, as he expected, met Sir William at the club, and when he showed him the letters Jockey Jack had received the baronet felt surprised, and yet relieved.

"I thought it better to show you them at once," said Dalton, "because I believe Flushton visits your house, and if he can betray a man, and at the same time accept his hospitality, he must be a scoundrel."

"You did quite right, Dalton. Hector Flushton will have to answer me in public for this. I'll make him face the charge in this very club, or brand him as a liar and a scoundrel!" said Sir William, hotly.

"Don't do anything rash," said Dalton. "Take him steady. Give him his head and he'll hang himself."

Sir William could not help smiling at Dalton's racing vernacular, and he said:

"All right, Ned. I'll keep him well in hand, but I'll make him jump this obstacle or fall ignominiously in the attempt. Jockey Jack does you credit. The fellow's a gentleman by instinct, if not by birth. I wonder how many men would have sacrificed what he did for the sake of a mother he had never known, and on the strength of an anonymous letter.

'Tell him I am sorry I ever doubted him, and that he shall ride for me when and where he pleases. I'll never take him off again—no, not if I saw him in the chair at a jockey ring meeting !'

"He's a good lad, Sir William, and he shall marry my daughter, Hettie, if she'll have him, and it's pretty long odds on that," said Dalton.

"He'll make her a good husband, I'm sure," said Sir William, "and when the event does come off I'll not forget who Jack is and what he did. That last ride on Blue Blood may after all turn out the best stroke of luck he will ever have."

Sir William little thought how true were the words he had just spoken.

When Dalton left the club Sir William read the letters Jockey Jack had received carefully over again.

He felt he had been duped by Hector Flushton, and he saw at once what had been the reason for writing these letters. He had made up his mind to go and see Miss St. George at "The Diamonds," and then he thought it would, perhaps, be unwise to do so. The person he had to deal with was Hector Flushton.

He must have sat an half an hour or more pondering over these letters, when looking at his watch he found it rather late, and putting the letters in his pocket he rose to go.

He spoke to three or four well-known sporting men who were idling away the time, and then went towards the door.

It opened at that moment, and Sir William found himself face to face with Hector Flushton.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SCENE AT THE CLUB.

WHEN Sir William saw Hector Flushton facing him in the doorway, anger nearly obtained the mastery over him, but by a great effort he controlled his feelings. His face, however, must have expressed dislike and contempt for the man who stood before him, for Flushton paused for a moment, and did not speak.

Sir William remained standing, and it was almost impossible for Flushton to pass him and enter the room.

At length he said, as he held out his hand :

“ Good evening, Sir William.”

The baronet took no notice of his proffered greeting, but moved slightly on one side to let him pass.

Sir William hesitated a moment, and then followed him into the room. He walked quietly up to Flushton, and in a tone of voice loud enough for others to hear, said :

“ Have you any idea who wrote the anonymous letters to Jockey Jack and myself, which caused me to put Blake up on Blue Blood in the Newmarket Handicap ? ”

Hector Flushton started slightly. “ I know nothing about anonymous letters,” he said. “ I am not in the habit of writing them, or of paying much attention to them when received.”

“ Have you ever seen these before ? ” said Sir

William, as he held out the letters, but kept them in his hand.

Flushton looked at the writing, and at once saw they were the letters written by Miss St. George.

"No," said Flushton ; "I don't recollect having seen them before."

"Perhaps you do not know who wrote them?" said Sir William.

"The handwriting seems familiar to me," said Flushton.

"It ought to be," replied Sir William. "Let me read one of them for your edification, as I don't think you have heard it before, but you are acquainted with the writer."

He read aloud the last letter Jack had received from Miss St. George, and it caused a great sensation amongst those present.

"What have you to say to that?" asked Sir William.

"It's a lie!" said Flushton. "It's a put-up job. I never told the woman who wrote that to send letters either to you or Jack."

"It is not a lie!" said Sir William. "Hector Flushton, you are a scoundrel!"

Flushton turned white with suppressed rage, and bit his lips.

"You shall answer for this insult, Sir William," he said.

"You have a good deal to answer to me for before I have done with you," was the reply.

Then turning to the clubmen present, he said :

"Gentlemen, I wish to state publicly that Hector

Flushton was the instigator of the anonymous letters written by this woman. He had at the time she wrote them some hold over her. Men of his stamp often have over women of hers. Such base conduct can only meet with one reward. It is my intention to ask the committee to expel Mr. Flushton from this club."

There was a murmur of approval.

"Expel me from this club, will you?" said Flushton, passionately. "Take care you don't go too far, or you'll repent it as long as you live."

"If you consider yourself publicly insulted as I intended you should, you have your remedy," said Sir William.

"And I mean to take it," said Flushton. "You have probably been to see the woman who wrote that epistle. She resides at 'The Diamonds,' does she not? A nice place for a respectable married man to visit."

"Mind what you are saying," said Sir William, hotly. "I have never visited that place since I was married."

"Probably you were a favoured visitor there before that interesting event took place," said Flushton, sneeringly.

"I have nothing more to say to you," said Sir William. "I cannot hold any further conversation with a man who does not possess a single attribute of a gentleman. In future you must consider your visits to my house are at an end, and you shall never enter my doors again. Gentlemen," he went on, "this man," pointing to Flushton, who seemed unable to move from where he stood, "has been invited to my house frequently as a guest, and he has used that privilege to attempt to defraud me, for

I can call it by no other name. He deliberately planned, in conjunction with confederates, no doubt, to make Blue Blood safe for the Newmarket. He succeeded only too well, as you all know, although in the end he was defeated at his own game by St. Almo's victory. If it interests him I may as well state I backed St. Almo, and thus saved myself a considerable sum of money. The public shall know why Blue Blood lost, and what caused him to lose. If this man is not warned off the turf before long it will be no fault of mine. As I said before, he shall never enter my house again, and I will not be a member of any club where his name is on the list of members. He is a liar and a scoundrel, and he knows it!"

Flushton raised his clenched hand as though to strike Sir William, but two or three people held him back.

"Let him come if he likes," said Sir William. "I am not afraid to deal with him."

"By ——!" shouted Flushton, now thoroughly excited, "I'll force you to receive me at your house. If you do not, I'll drag your name in the mud deeper than you'll care for. Your honour's in my hands. Ah, ah!" laughed Flushton, savagely, as he noticed Sir William start, "see, he knows it's true. Look at him! It's my turn now."

Sir William seemed agitated. What could this man mean? Again the thought flashed through his mind. Could Lady Melissa be concerned in it? No, it could not be possible. He turned on Flushton and said:

"You hound! My honour, indeed.! It is safe from a man who does not possess honour, or even know the meaning of the word."

"Go on," said Flushton. "I like to hear you. Will you admit me to your house again, eh? Take care how you answer."

"No, you blackguard, I will not!" said Sir William.

"Then by Heaven! your wife shall," was the foul retort.

Sir William reeled as though he had been struck. He instantly recovered himself, and, darting at Flushton, dashed aside the men near him, and in a moment had him by the throat.

Sir William was an athletic man, and had been well trained in his youth.

His grip on Flushton's throat was as firm as an iron vice. He shook him as easily as he would a child.

"Down on your knees!" said Sir William. "Down, you hound, and apologize, or I'll choke the life out of your wretched body."

With strength given him by his rage, and the vile insult put upon him he forced Flushton to the ground.

"Let him go, Sir William. You're strangling him!" said one of the onlookers.

Flushton mumbled out some words of apology, and Sir William pushed him away with such force that he fell on the floor.

"Let him alone, he's not worth it, Sir William," said an intimate friend of his. "No one believes a word he has said. Come with me," and his friend took him aside.

Sir William drove home in an excited frame of mind. The words, "then, by Heaven, your wife shall," still rang in his ears, and made his blood boil. What could Flushton have meant? He never

doubted his wife for a moment, but he had often fancied there was something in her past life she might have concealed from him. In the position of life in which she was placed before he married her he knew what temptations must have been put in her way. That she had ever done anything which as Flushton's words seem to hint would compromise his honour he would never believe. "Then, by Heaven, your wife shall," implied a threat that Flushton could force Lady Melissa to receive him. Even if this man did know anything of her past life, he (Sir William) had married her, and at any cost he would shield her.

But he was angry with her all the same. No man could hear such words as Flushton had spoken without losing his head and his judgment. Sir William made up his mind he would have it out with Lady Melissa, but he hardly knew how to set about it.

When he arrived at home he found Lady Melissa had retired for the night.

He felt relieved, it would give him time to cool down and think the matter over quietly.

Brooding over it would do no good, but for the life of him he could not get those words out of his head.

In an abstracted way he sat twirling the ring on his little finger, which contained a fine diamond.

It slipped off on to the floor and he hardly noticed it, until glancing down he saw the stone flashing brilliantly in the reflected gas-light.

He started as though a sudden idea had occurred to him.

"The Diamonds" had been mentioned at the club that night, and he wondered where he had heard the name before under other circumstances. Ah! he remembered now, and as he did so it sent a chill to his heart.

He saw it all. That piece of paper with "The Diamonds" on that he picked up and asked his wife what it meant. He felt sure now the name had been written in capitals. She had said it was a memorandum about her diamonds which he had offered to take to the jeweller's, but which she said she would take herself. Was it likely she would have written the words like that, or on such a piece of paper? This trivial incident which he had dismissed from his mind at the time came back with quite another meaning attached to it. He could hardly sleep that night for thinking of it.

Next morning he did not mention the scene of the night before to his wife.

He went early into the city and called at the jeweller's where he knew Lady Melissa was in the habit of going.

"Did Lady Melissa leave her diamonds here a few weeks ago?" he asked in a casual way.

"No, Sir William," was the answer. "Her ladyship has not been here for some time past."

"Then she must have made a mistake," said Sir William. "I fancied she said she took them here. Good morning."

And he went home in a dejected manner, with the ominous words uttered by Hector Flushton surging through his brain with terrible significance.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LADY MELISSA AT BAY.

AT dinner-time Lady Melissa noticed her husband appeared to be in an abstracted frame of mind, and she exerted herself to please him, fancying he must have had some business worries to annoy him.

But despite her efforts he remained morose and gloomy, and she gave it up in despair.

When they were alone Sir William thought how he should commence the task he had set himself.

At last he said, quite calmly :

"Nora, I thought you said you were going to take your diamonds to the jeweller's? Did you do so?"

She looked up in surprise.

"I don't recollect saying so," she replied. "I have not had any occasion to take them there."

"You certainly said you were going to do so. What a short memory you have. Do you recollect my asking you what the words 'The Diamonds' meant written on a piece of paper in your hand-writing?" He watched her closely.

Lady Melissa seemed to have suddenly turned faint, for she sank back in her chair and gazed vacantly before her.

She saw it all now. That fatal name. Could it

be possible Sir William had discovered she had been at "The Diamonds," and with Hector Flushton? That would be terrible. What would he think of her? What could he think, but that one fatal meaning attached to such conduct? She recovered her self-possession as quickly as possible, and answered:

"I remember now. I must have made a note about wearing my diamonds. You recollect we went to a ball that week."

"Nora, tell me the truth," he replied. "Why did you write those words on that paper?"

"Tell me the truth. Then he does not trust me," she thought.

"I hardly know what you mean by telling you the truth," she said, haughtily. "Do you doubt my word?"

"I should be sorry to do so," said Sir William, calmly. "Why did you write those words?"

"Really, I hardly know now. It was such a trivial incident. I have forgotten all about it," she said to all outward appearance with calmness, but she could feel her heart beating violently, and her brain throbbed as though on fire.

"It may be a trivial incident if looked upon by itself, but connected with other circumstances which have come to my knowledge it is an important one to me," he replied.

"I hardly know what you mean. Surely, you have heard nothing which can possibly interest me about my diamonds?" she said.

"I met Hector Flushton at the club last night," he replied. "We had a quarrel over the hand he

had in Blue Blood's defeat in the Newmarket. I threw him to the ground because——"

"William, what are you saying?"

There could be no mistaking the agony in her voice. Lady Melissa had risen from her chair, and stood before him the picture of mute despair. Her hands were clasped convulsively, and her face was white as marble.

"Merely remarking what occurred at the club last night. You seem strangely agitated over it. Sit down. I have not finished yet."

She obeyed him mechanically, and moved like one in a dream.

Her evident distress seemed to harden him against her. He felt it was a sign of guilt. He went on:

"I threw him to the ground. I could have killed him for the foul lie he uttered. After exposing him to the members of the club he made some rambling remarks about compromising my honour. I laughed at his threats. Then I ordered him never to enter my house again. What was his reply, do you think?"

Lady Melissa looked at him with a piteous face, as she replied:

"What could he say? Nothing. If you forbade him your house, what could he possibly say?"

"He said, Nora, 'Then, by Heaven, your wife shall!'"

Had an avalanche fallen it could not have effected a greater change than came over Lady Melissa at hearing those words. She seemed to have become another woman; no trace of her former self re-

mained. She sprang to her feet and faced Sir William boldly, as she said, with indignation visible in every line of her face, and heard in every tone of her voice? "And what do you think he meant by those words."

"That is what you must answer," replied Sir William.

"And you shall have my answer," she said. "I can see what you believe by your face. William, I have been a faithful wife to you"—her voice trembled a little. "I have endeavoured to be all that a wife should be, and yet at the first vile calumny uttered by a coward and a man you despise, you believe the worst a man can possibly believe of his wife."

Sir William made a gesture of dissent.

"Do not deny it," she went on. "This man Hector Flushton made such a statement in a public club, and you believed he could carry out his threat. You should have thrashed him as he deserved. How dare he say such words? Hector Flushton and I have not one feeling in common. He has basely betrayed the hospitality he has received here. Let him dare come to this house again, and I will have the door closed in his face. William, you have trusted me for years, cannot you trust me now? Cannot you see I speak the truth. I swear to you this man is nothing to me. I loathe the sight of him. I hate and despise him. I can hardly speak to him without a shudder, and yet he dared to say those words. William, you must, you *shall* believe me."

"I do believe you, Nora. Be calm and listen to me. That you have done anything to compromise

our honour I refuse to believe. Tell me, Nora, has this man any power over you? If you will confide in me believe me I will help you. You are my wife, and should have no secrets from me. Is there anything in your past life which he fancies can be raked up to the discredit of anyone connected with you. I will never believe it can affect yourself personally. Sometimes I have fancied you are hiding a secret from me. If it be so, be silent no longer. I will freely forgive if there is anything to forgive. Come, Nora, be your old self, and tell me what this man means."

His kindness disarmed her at once. The man speaking to her was the Sir William of her younger days. His voice soothed her strangely, and yet she felt she could never tell him all, at least not yet.

She knelt down at his side, and put her fair arms on his knees. Then the proud woman became the suppliant, and burying her face in her hands she sobbed bitterly.

He soothed her tenderly, as he would have done a child, and pacified her with endearing words.

"Courage, Nora. If you have anything to tell me, now is the time. I have the right to protect you from insult, and, by Heaven, I will. You are my wife, be as true to me now as I always believe, and always shall believe you have been."

"God bless you for those words, William," she said, in a broken voice, as she lifted her tear-stained eyes to his. "But ask me no more now. I have been a wicked woman, but, believe me, I did it all for the best."

"Not wicked, Nora," he replied. "Perhaps you have been thoughtless, but not wicked."

"Oh, William, why could I not have told you all before?"

"All what?" he asked, and his heart began to misgive him. It might be worse than he expected.

"Don't ask me," she moaned.

"But I have a right to know, Nora, and I will know," he said, firmly.

After a painful pause Lady Melissa rose from her knees. She placed both hands on his shoulders, and, looking in his face, said in tremulous tones :

"William, come to my room, and I will tell you all."

She went out, and he rose and followed her.

She glanced at him and said :

"William, we have been married now for years. When you asked me to be your wife I told you that my parents were unknown to you, and that about myself you knew little. You still wished me to marry you, and promised that nothing should ever part us. Let me see now if you will keep that promise. When I married you, William, I never told you I had been a wife before."

He started from her, and a pained look passed over his face.

"I know it was wrong," she said. "I should have told you. But think of my position. I wished to bury the bitter past, leave it all behind as a hideous dream. Can you blame me? I do not think you will when you have heard all. When I was little more than a girl I married a man, who did what no

doubt hundreds have done, deceived me. Before we had been married a month he struck me. He led me a life of misery, but I was faithful and true to him. He tried by every means in his power to drive me to despair. Finding I would not leave him, he deserted me. He left me in a pitiable plight, and had I not met with kind friends Heaven knows what would have become of me. Then—then—oh, William, I cannot tell you,” and she threw herself before him in the abandonment of her grief.

Sir William did not move. He seemed stunned with the weight of some heavy blow.

“My poor girl,” he said, quietly, “my own Nora, how you must have suffered.”

Then his thoughts were for her sufferings, not for the wrong she had done him? And this was the man she had thought hard and cold, a man of the world, and a man who could not love deeply.

“William, you can pity me,” she said. “Oh, how I have wronged you.”

“How, Nora?” he asked.

“I thought you did not love me, and at times it nearly broke my heart,” she replied.

“And do you love me so much, Nora?” he asked.

“I have grown to love you more and more every year,” she said.

Sir William drew her gently to him and kissed her.

“Have you anything more to tell me, Nora?” he said.

She went to her writing desk, unlocked it, and took out the box in which she put the papers she had received from Miss St. George.

She handed one to Sir William.

He read it carefully through. It was a marriage certificate, and authentic, of that he had no doubt, and a confident smile passed over his face.

"This is all right, Nora. There is no disgrace in a former marriage. Is—is he——"

"Dead," said Lady Melissa. "Here is the certificate of his death from the authorities at Charters Towers. He went there mining, I heard of his doings from the papers first, for he had not taken the trouble to change his name even. Then I wrote to the superintendent of police about him. He replied in a very kind note, and told me I was much better without the society of such a man, as he was speedily drinking himself to death, and had gambled away all the money he had earned. Then came the news of his death, and I wrote to ascertain if it were correct. The hospital authorities obtained me this certificate, and said he came to a fearful end, and was a raving madman at the finish."

Sir William handed her back the papers and said :

"Keep them, Nora. I never doubted you, and now I know you have nothing to fear."

"He has never asked about the child," she thought. "Shall I tell him?"

Sir William was standing in deep thought, and did not notice her hesitation.

Had he given her a hint she would have told him all, but the opportunity went by, and Lady Melissa remained silent.

"Does Flushton know of this?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lady Melissa.

"And this is the hold he has over you, as he thinks ? He will find he is mistaken," said Sir William.

A thought seemed to strike him, and he asked :

"Have you had those papers ever since we were married, Nora ?"

Lady Melissa's face was covered with a deep blush, as she hesitatingly replied.

"No, I have not."

"Then how did you discover them ?"

"Flushton found out where they were."

"How could he do so ?" asked Sir William.

"A woman whose mother formerly looked after my——"

"Great God !" said Sir William, grasping her by the hand. "Had you a—a——?" he could not say the word.

She hung her head, as she replied :

"Yes, William, I had a child."

"But it's d—dead ?"

"No," she said, faintly.

This was indeed an unexpected blow, but he bore it bravely.

"And Hector Flushton knows all this ?" he said.

"Yes," she answered in a whisper.

He saw now the danger she was in. He saw at once what a hold the man had over her. But it must be met and fought down.

"Where did Flushton hear of this ?" he said.

"At the house of a woman he is intimate with."

"But how did you get possession of the papers ? He must have known his knowledge would not be of much use without them."

"I obtained them from the woman. She gave them to me without his knowledge," said Lady Melissa.

"How did you find her out?" he asked.

"He told me where I could see her."

"And you went there?"

"Yes."

"By yourself?"

"No."

"With whom?"

"With him."

"Hector Flushton?" said Sir William, excitedly

"Yes."

"My God! Nora, how could you have been so reckless?" he said.

"I meant to have the papers, William. I did it for the best. I got them in order to save your good name from reproach."

"And what did this villain demand as the price of those papers?" asked Sir William in suppressed wrath.

Lady Melissa was silent.

"The cowardly, dastardly villain," he said.

"But the woman gave them to me. He thinks she has them now. I told you so, before," she replied.

"And what place did you go to with this—this man?" he asked.

"Don't ask me, William. Oh, don't ask me," she moaned.

"I must know, Nora. I will know," he said. "Tell me all. It is the only way I have of saving you from further pain. Where did you go with him?"

"The Diamonds," she said, hoarsely.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CRITICAL SITUATION.

CRUSHED by the revelations made by Lady Melissa, Sir William for some time could hardly realize the truth.

Lady Melissa watched him where he sat after sinking back into his chair, and felt it would be better to remain silent until he had recovered his self-command.

Now it was over she was glad she had told him all. A load of care had been lifted from her shoulders, but it was with feelings of remorse she saw how bitterly it had affected her husband.

Lady Melissa clenched her hands, and a look of determination came into her face. Hector Flushton should never glory in a victory over herself and husband, come what might. But how to prevent it? She thought for a few moments, and then gently moving to Sir William's side, laid her hand on his shoulder.

"William," she said, quietly.

He did not speak. His face was still buried in his hands.

"William, speak to me. Tell me I am forgiven; that you can still love me after all that has passed."

He looked up with a pained expression on his face, and said :

"Forgive you, Nora ? Willingly. Why did you not share this secret with me before ? It must have been a terrible strain upon you."

"He thinks of me still," she thought, and then said :

"I have been guilty all along, William, and I deserved to have suffered. Oh, how I wish I had told you all before we married. It would have saved you from an unequal match, and from much trouble and pain."

"It would have made no difference, Nora. I should still have married you. How could you be to blame because of another's wrong-doing ?" he replied.

"God bless you for those words, William. They give me fresh life and courage to face the task I have before me."

He looked up again quickly with a glance of inquiry.

"I mean," she said, "the task I must undertake to free us from the hold Hector Flushton has over us."

"That will be my business," said Sir William. "Leave him to me. I will find a means of silencing him."

"No, you must not speak to him," she replied. "Let me have my way. I will see this man, and then let him beware."

"Nora, you don't know what you are saying. I said he should never enter my house again, and he shall not," said Sir William.

"But he must. It is part of my plan," she said.

He made a gesture of impatience and dissent.

"He will come here, and at my request," she said. "It is absolutely necessary he should do so."

"Nora, can you beat this man at the dangerous game you would play?" he asked, incredulously.

"I can," she replied, in a confident tone.

"How?" he asked.

She smiled, as she said:

"You have trusted me, William, more than I ought ever to have hoped for. Trust me in this, and I promise you I will not fail."

"He is a dangerous man. It would not be safe for you to be alone with him," he said.

"I have no fear of Hector Flushton. He is a coward," she said, contemptuously.

"You're right there," said Sir William. "If you must have your own way, be it so, but I would much rather you let me deal with him. I could easily find the means to silence his tongue."

Lady Melissa got her own way in the end, on condition that Sir William should be in the house when Hector Flushton called.

Flushton sat in his room in no enviable frame of mind, when a letter was brought to him.

"Waiting for an answer," said the man.

Flushton tore open the envelope, and his face expressed the utmost astonishment and delight.

Here was the very thing he had been scheming for actually thrown into his way. Lady Melissa asked him to come to Sir William's house for a private interview.

He wrote a hasty note accepting the invitation, and gave it to the waiter.

For the remainder of the day Flushton was in high spirits. He felt like a champion who had overcome all obstacles. He had never been in such an amiable frame of mind before.

"I'll keep it all dark," he thought. "Best not to let anyone know my little game. It will be a surprise for 'em. 'The beautiful wife of Sir William eloped last night with Mr. Hector Flushton, a gentleman well known in sporting circles, and an intimate friend of the baronet's.' How would that read, eh? What a sensation it will make," and Flushton smiled gleefully at the prospect of being the centre figure in such a society scandal. Men like Flushton gloat over such vile deeds, and revel in the misery and disgrace they cause.

Hector Flushton looked his best as he drove in a cab to Sir William's house. The man could look well when he chose, and he was almost handsome. He rang the bell boldly, and was admitted, so he fancied, with a cautious and somewhat deferential air.

"Never enter his house again," he thought. "Well, Sir William, I think I shall be even with you this time."

He was taken into Lady Melissa's private room, and again a thrill of exultation passed through him as he thought:

"She has never received me here before. This is, indeed, a great success."

He had not long to wait. Lady Melissa entered the room, carefully closing the door, and, as she faced him, he thought she had never looked more beautiful.

He made a step towards her, but she motioned him back, and he looked somewhat disconcerted. He had anticipated a much warmer reception than this.

"I am glad to see you looking so well," he said. "How beautiful you are, Nora ;" boldness he fancied would be best.

"I do not require your compliments, Mr. Flushton, and you must please recollect I am Lady Melissa," she said, haughtily.

He did not like her tone, and he said :

"Your note was more familiar than your manners are, Lady Melissa. Come, there is no need for coldness between such friends as we are."

"You are no friend of mine, Hector Flushton, and you know it !" she said.

"Then why did you send for me ?" he asked.

"To ask you to act as a man. To give me those compromising papers, and to bury my secret in your heart," she said, slowly.

Flushton smiled. This was really too good a joke. He had been plotting and planning for this interview, and here he was calmly asked to give up his weapons of war.

"Surely you are not in earnest, Lady Melissa ?" he said. "This must be some joke."

"I am very much in earnest," she replied.

"Listen to me," said Flushton. "You are in my power, and you know it. You went with me alone to that house. You stayed in that house with me for some considerable time. What will Sir William, what will the world, say when they hear that story ? They will say that Lady Melissa is ——"

"Stop!" she said in such a determined voice that Hector Flushton did not utter another word. "You have arranged a very nice story, a story which, if the world knew, would bring, as you think, shame and disgrace upon me. But do you think for one moment any sane person would believe such a tale told by *you* concerning myself?" and the contempt in her tone stung him to the quick.

"They must believe it. I have witnesses. I have the proof of your guilt. I have——"

"Anything more?" she asked, calmly, as he hesitated.

"What more is needed?" he said, passionately. "Come, Lady Melissa, I have had enough of this trifling. You shall do as I wish, or you shall be driven out of the society you love so well."

"And I have had enough of you, Hector Flushton. I asked you here to-night to see if you had any spark of manhood in you. I asked you here to see if you possessed a particle of honour. When I look at you and think you once had the audacity to wish to make me your wife, I shudder at the thought. My husband," she said, proudly, "is a man of honour and of stainless name. I bear that name, and do you dare—you, the defamer of women—come to me and propose a compact so horrible that the vilest must hide their heads for very shame at it? Do you dare, I say, here, under my husband's roof, ask me to sully the name he gave me, which is dearer to me than life? You do not know me, Hector Flushton. Keep back! Dare to move a step further and I will call the household."

Flushton seemed cowed by this torrent of accusation. As Lady Melissa went on he became purple with suppressed rage, and he could not forbear taking a step towards her. He quickly drew back, however, and recovered his self-possession.

"I'm glad you've finished," he said. "You shall pay dearly for this night's work! Before morning all Melbourne shall know of your disgrace, and the story of your life, so carefully concealed from your loving husband. Every newspaper shall have an authentic account of your real character, and you will be branded as an adventuress, who has taken in a too easily gulled dupe. I will give you one chance, Lady Melissa. You know what that chance is. I shall accept no other terms."

"Your presence here is an outrage," she said. "But before you go I have something more to say to you, Hector Flushton."

"You can have nothing to say I care to hear except an acceptance of my terms."

"You think not. Wait one moment. Let me ask you one or two questions."

"I will not be questioned by you," he said.

"You must. You shall. Who has those papers which you think so deeply compromise me?"

Her coolness exasperated him; he began to feel afraid.

"You know well enough who has them," he said.

"But you do not," was the unexpected reply.

Flushton could hardly believe his ears. Lady Melissa's audacity, as he thought it, astounded him.

"Don't I?" he laughed, harshly. "I suppose you fancy you can get them?"

"No, Hector Flushton, I do not fancy I can get them. I have got them," and she pulled the papers quickly out of the bosom of her dress.

"It's a lie! It's a d——nation lie!" roared Flushton, as he made a grab at them.

But Lady Melissa was too quick for him. She slipped aside and placed the table between them, while she put one hand on the bell.

"Attempt to obtain these papers again, and I ring for the police."

"Police!" gasped Flushton.

"Certainly. You could not for one moment fancy I should receive such a distinguished visitor without having a guard of honour for the occasion!" said Lady Melissa, sarcastically.

"If it will interest you to know how I obtained these papers," said Lady Melissa, "I may tell you I had them in my possession when you drove back from that house with me."

Hector Flushton clenched his hands and bit his lips. That was being outwitted indeed.

"You may smile, Lady Melissa," he said; "but you forget you accompanied me to 'The Diamonds.' That will not tell in your favour."

"No one will believe such a statement," said Lady Melissa. "You would never have the audacity to make it."

Lady Melissa's indiscretion had, after all, proved her safeguard.

"You see I am correct," said Lady Melissa. "It

is useless for you to remain here longer. I hope the interview is what you expected, from the tenor of my note?"

"Ah," said Flushton. "Your note. I had forgotten that. I have it safe here, my lady. It's rather compromising. Says 'Sir William will be out,' and so on. That would not redound to your credit. An assignation arranged by Lady Melissa with Hector Flushton."

"I knew you would bring it with you," said Lady Melissa, quietly. "Will you give it to me?"

"Not much," snarled Flushton.

"Then I really must call my guard of honour to take it from you," she said.

"The police dare not touch me. I came here on your invitation, they will see that my statement is correct from the letter itself. You can't catch me tripping again, my lady. I have you this time. Call your guard of honour," he sneered.

"I will," she said, and rang the bell twice, while Flushton felt an inward quaking, which was decidedly uncomfortable.

The door opened, and Sir William Melissa, entering the room, stood by his wife's side.

"I am Lady Melissa's guard of honour, Hector Flushton," he said, in calm tones, but with a dangerous glitter in his eyes that the trembling coward knew he had seen before.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SIGNING A CONFESSION.

WHEN Flushton recovered from his surprise at Sir William's unexpected entrance, he saw at once he had been trapped. It was no use; he must face it out. He held a strong hand yet. Sir William Melissa could never know his wife had been to such a place as "The Diamonds," thought Flushton. That would give him a loophole of escape.

"I am glad you guard your wife's honour so securely," said Flushton. "It needs a good deal of preserving."

"Silence!" said Sir William. "Breathe one word against my wife, and you shall suffer for it in a manner you little expect!"

"Be calm, William," said Lady Melissa. "Will you give me that letter?" she said to Flushton.

"No," he said. "It is my property, and I shall keep it."

"Then I am afraid I shall have to make you give it to me," said Sir William.

"Indeed!" said Flushton. "You are mistaken; I shall give it neither to you nor Lady Melissa."

"We shall see about that," said Sir William. "Nora, you had better leave us alone together. I

may be able to effect an understanding with *Mr. Flushton* then."

Lady Melissa was about to leave the room when Flushton said :

"Perhaps Sir William would like to hear what I have to say before you leave the room, Lady Melissa."

She hesitated, and he went on :

"I wonder what Sir William will say when he hears you paid a visit to the——"

"Stop," said Sir William, "Lady Melissa has told me all. You are too mean and contemptible a cur for a man in my position to notice. I only regret you should ever have entered my house, which you have defiled with your presence, and I bitterly regret you should have associated with my guests, whom you have contaminated. I will give you one chance of escape. First of all give me that letter Lady Melissa wrote you."

Flushton, now thoroughly cowed, handed it over in silence, and Sir William tore it in pieces.

"Listen carefully to what I have to say. You must sign a document admitting you entered into a conspiracy to defraud myself and others. We need not bandy words as to what the exact nature of that conspiracy was, but it can be put down at a set sum of money. If you agree to sign such proof of your guilt, I will give you my word of honour not to molest you, and I think that will be quite sufficient even for you."

"How do I know you will not make use of it?" said Flushton.

"I have given you my word of honour I will never make use of it against you if you keep silent," said Sir William, haughtily. "If you cannot understand a man being pledged by his word of honour, I may explain that I should hardly be likely to make use of such a document against you for the sake of my wife and my own good name."

Lady Melissa left the room and the two men were together.

"I will give you ten minutes to make up your mind," said Sir William.

"And if I refuse to sign?" said Flushton.

"Then I shall have you arrested to-morrow morning," calmly said Sir William.

Flushton felt almost mad. He had fancied himself so clever, and it had been clearly proved he was a mere dunce. He had no desire to be cut by all his fellow men, nor could he look upon the probable chance of imprisonment with any degree of pleasure. He put the alternative straight before him, and he came to the conclusion he had better accept Sir William's terms. At last he said:

"You force me to sign this document, and although I do not confess I defrauded you or anyone else, I am compelled to say in so many words that I do."

"Nothing of the kind," said Sir William. "You sign it of your own free will, knowing it is true, and that you have no alternative. Look, I have drawn the paper up while you have been thinking over the matter."

Flushton took the paper Sir William handed to him and read:

"I, the undersigned, Hector Flushton, declare on

my oath that I entered into a conspiracy to defraud Sir William Melissa of a certain sum of money, to wit, the stakes won in the Newmarket Handicap by St. Almo. I sign this document of my own free will, and as a reparation for the wrong I intended to do the said Sir William Melissa."

Then followed the usual places for signature and witnesses.

"I will not sign that," said Flushton.

Sir William rose from his chair, and said: "Then we have finished our interview, and you can leave my house at once; but, recollect, a warrant will be issued for your arrest in the morning, come what may of the consequences."

"Who's to be the witness?" said Flushton.

"Marks, my butler," said Sir William.

"But he will have to read the document," said Flushton.

"He will," said Sir William.

"He may split," said Flushton, in sporting vernacular.

"Marks will not 'split,' as you term it," said Sir William, coldly.

Flushton scowled, but made no remark.

"Will you sign it?" asked Sir William

"Yes," said Flushton.

Sir William rang the bell.

"Send Marks here," he said to the servant.

"Marks," said Sir William, "I wish you to witness Mr. Flushton's signature to this document. You must read it before he signs it, and you must promise me never to divulge what it contains."

"It's coming," thought Marks. "He's caught 'em at it. Oh, that it should ever come to this. My poor master."

Marks settled himself down, fixed his spectacles with great deliberation, and read the paper.

"So it was you caused me to lose the four pound on Blue Blood. You're a rogue, you're a——"

"Marks, Marks," said Sir William, who had some difficulty in keeping his countenance.

"Yes, Sir William," said Marks.

"I'm sorry to hear you bet, Marks. It's a very bad thing indeed to gamble. See what it's brought Mr. Flushton to. I'm afraid I shall hardly be able to keep you here if you set such a bad example to your fellow servants," said Sir William, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Don't send me away, Sir William, I'm an old man, I've served you faithfully. I only backed Blue Blood because he was one of the family. Jockey Jack gave me the straight tip. I got 100 to 4 about him, sir. It would have made me, that wager," sighed old Marks.

Sir William took out his cheque-book and wrote a cheque for £100.

"There's your wager," said Sir William. "If I had not been such a fool as to have been gulled by this man, Jockey Jack would have ridden Blue Blood, and you would have won your money. Take it, Marks, you richly deserve it. You have been a good and faithful servant to me. Part with you, old Marks? Never," and he laid his hand kindly on the old man's shoulder.

A blush of shame spread over Hector Flushton's face. The man was not quite bad at heart after all his villainy.

"And this is the man whom I have tried to rob of his honour and his wife," he thought as he looked at Sir William.

Almost for the first time in his life Flushton had seen the true nobility of a gentleman, and he respected it.

"Sign this paper," said Sir William as he pushed it towards Flushton. "Witness the signature Marks."

Flushton signed it, Marks witnessed it, and Sir William signed it.

"I have done with you now, once and for all, Hector Flushton," said Sir William. "You can go."

Hector Flushton staggered to his feet. He looked Sir William in the face and said, respectfully:

"You may not believe me, Sir William, when I tell you I honour you more than any man I ever met in my life. This may seem strange coming from a man who tried to rob you of that honour. The scene I have witnessed between you and that old man I could never have believed had it been told me. I have been taught in a rough school, and have not had much chance of going straight. I have signed that paper, but believe me if you can, I would never breathe a word against you if it did not exist. I apologize for what I have done, and if you will say to Lady Melissa I am deeply sorry for having caused her pain you will confer a favour on me. I will try and be a better man. I'm not all bad," he said,

passionately, "but the world seems dead against me."

"You have set the world against you, Hector Flushton," said Sir William; "try and make amends for the wrong you have done. Cut your old acquaintances, and start a new life. I will tell Lady Melissa what you have said. Good night."

"Good night," said Flushton, and with his head bent low and faltering steps, he went out of the room and left the house.

Sir William told Lady Melissa what Flushton had said, and showed her the paper he had signed.

"William, let us forgive if we cannot forget," she said. "I hope he will lead a better life. He has been a wicked man."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MOTHER AND SON.

"JACK, if you're riding over to Melbourne this morning you may as well take this note to Sir William Melissa's," said Ned Dalton to Jockey Jack, a few days after the occurrence related in the last chapter.

"Very well," replied Jack. "I thought of going into the city. I want to make a purchase for Hettie."

"Indeed!" said Dalton with a smile. "She's making calls upon you early. What commission has she given you this time?"

"An important one. But she did not give it me. I'm going to buy her a ring," said Jack, with a self-conscious smile.

"Oh!" said Dalton, with a smile. "So you're going to bind the engagement fast, are you. Well, I wish you both luck, my lad. I'd a tough fight with the 'missus,' but I beat her bad at the finish."

Jack smiled, as he replied:

"I shall overcome her prejudices against me in time. When she sees how happy we are, she'll relent," said Jack.

As Jack rode towards Sir William Melissa's he passed Hector Flushton, who motioned him to stop.

Now Jack had an instinctive dislike to Flushton, and no wonder, but it was not in his nature to refuse to speak to him. He reined in his horse, and said :

“What do you want with me, Mr. Flushton?”

“I want to tell you,” said Flushton, “that I’m sorry for the part I took in that Blue Blood business. You may not believe me when I say so, but I assure you I am.”

“It was a mean trick to play,” said Jack, “and it might have ruined me, probably would have done had not Mr. Dalton and Sir William stuck to me. If you really are sorry for your share of the business, I’m glad of it. That, at any rate, will make some amends.”

“It wasn’t all my fault,” said Flushton. “I was led into it to a certain extent by others.”

“I dare say you were,” replied Jack. “I’m glad I saw you this morning. It shows you’re not quite so bad as I thought you were.”

As Jack rode up to the house, Lady Melissa saw him, and her heart beat fast, and a sudden desire to see him came over her.

Sir William was out, and even if he were at home she felt the time had come when she could explain all to him.

As to Jack being her son she had no doubt. The miniature proved it, and a slight birth-mark on one side of his neck, which she had noted on her visit to Dalton’s, left no possible doubt in her mind. So when Jack rang the bell he was informed that Lady Melissa wished to see him.

She had told Marks what she desired, and **once**

more the old butler could hardly make her ladyship out.

Jack waited expectantly in the room, and he also wondered what Lady Melissa could want with him.

When he had first seen her he felt attracted towards her, and a peculiar feeling had come over him. Her face seemed strangely familiar, and he had often seen it in his dreams. A confused mass of ideas and incidents connected with some one resembling her mixed themselves up in his imagination. He could not understand it, but he felt there was some strange affinity between them.

This strange feeling came over him again as Lady Melissa entered the room.

"I wish to see you for a few moments," said Lady Melissa, in a sweet voice. "I am greatly interested in Hettie Dalton, and I believe you are—shall I say her lover?"

"We are engaged to be married, my lady," said Jack.

"I am very glad to hear it. Hettie is a dear girl, and will make you an excellent wife, and I am sure you will make her a good husband."

"It is very kind of you to take such an interest in our fortunes, Lady Melissa."

"Not at all. It is a pleasure to me to hear of your good fortune," she replied. "How did you come to have the name of Jockey Jack?" she asked.

Jack told her how Hettie had given him the name, and he was prouder of it than any he could ever hope to bear.

"I never had any other name that I know of," said Jack, sadly.

"No," said Lady Melissa with a tremor in her voice. "How was that?"

"I was thrown on the world at a very early age," said Jack. "I remember a good kind lady, who came to see me when I was quite a little chap, and I think she must have been my mother," his voice faltered. "She was very kind to me, and I loved her very much in those far-away childish days."

"Have you any idea what she is like?" said Lady Melissa, softly.

Jack looked into her face, and again a strange thrill swept over him.

"If you will pardon me for saying so, Lady Melissa, I have such a strange feeling of late that the lady I used to call mother was like you."

How her heart beat. She could have clasped Jack to her arms and sobbed out her tale to him.

"I hope you are not offended," he said, anxiously.

"Oh no. Why should I be. Please tell me more of your story. I am interested," she said.

"For many weeks the lady came regularly to see me. Then all at once the visits ceased, and I became lost and melancholy. I dare say I was a bad lad, and, when the old woman died, in whose charge I had been placed, her daughter one day beat me, and I left the house and never returned. I led a wandering life, and was nearly starved to death at times. But somehow I managed to struggle hard for life, and when Mr. Dalton picked me up outside the Theatre Royal it was the turning-point in my

life. He is a good man, Lady Melissa, and has been very, very kind to me. Now he has given me his daughter, and I have not even a name to give her," he replied, sadly.

"And what must you think of the mother who deserted you?" said Lady Melissa.

"I do not think she deserted me," said Jack. "I have often thought it all over. Perhaps she was unable to come and see me for some weeks, and when I went away tried to find me and could not. From the faint recollection I have of her I feel sure she did not intend to wrong me."

"He's a noble fellow," she thought. "Heaven bless him for those words. They will make my task easier."

"You have a kind heart, Jack," she said to him; "and any mother would be proud to call you her son."

"I wish I could find my mother," said Jack. "I feel sure she is alive. I had a letter written me referring to her, and that is what took me to the Brightside Inn, and lost me the mount on Blue Blood."

"A letter?" said Lady Melissa. "Who wrote it?"

"I would rather not mention it to your ladyship," said Jack, with a blush. "It is not a fit name for you to hear."

Lady Melissa fancied she knew who had written that letter.

"So you would very much like to find your mother?" she said. "Would you not reproach her for her shameful conduct towards you in the past?" she asked.

"Do not call it shameful, Lady Melissa. I am sure there must be some explanation for it all," he replied.

"Have you ever seen that?" said Lady Melissa, handing the miniature to Jack.

He took it in his hand, and at once gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, that's the one my mother wore," he said. "She often used to show it to me. Oh, Lady Melissa, where did you get it? Do you know where she is? Tell me where I can find her, and I will bless you as long as you live."

He was looking at the miniature fondly, and Lady Melissa's heart was beating loudly, so loud that she thought it must almost be heard.

"Jack," she said in such a tone of passionate yearning that he looked up startled.

"Are you sure that is the miniature your mother wore?"

"Quite," he said. "I have no doubt about it. Of course I was a mere child, but the pleasant memories of my past life are very dear to me, and I recollect them all—there are so few of them."

"Shall I tell you a short story, Jack?" she said.

"I shall be pleased to hear anything you have to say," he replied in a surprised tone.

"I once knew a young girl about Hettie's age, who met with deep trouble. She married a man who treated her cruelly, and then basely deserted her. She struggled hard to maintain herself and the child born to her, and she succeeded. Fortune favoured her and sent her a noble, kind-hearted lover, who

offered her a title. At first she declined, although she loved him, knowing what her past life had been. Her first husband was dead and the temptation was great. At last her lover overcame her scruples, and she married him. But she made one fatal mistake. She concealed from him the history of her past life. Oh! Jack, never have any secrets between yourself and Hettie, you little know what misery it causes."

Jack was listening attentively to her story. It was evident he was greatly interested in it.

"Her husband," went on Lady Melissa, "was a good man, and she was surrounded with every luxury, and regarded with envy by the people who had before despised her. Time went on, until one day a man with a bad heart and a debased mind discovered her secret. He let her know he had discovered it, and showed her the proof. What was she to do? He drove her nearly to desperation with his base proposals. He attempted to alienate her from her husband for his own base purposes. Imagine the agony of mind she must have been in. She loathed and despised this man, and hated his bold attention to her. And all this time the wretch pretended to be her husband's friend. A time came when she obtained possession of these proofs, and then she felt she could battle with this man. I will not weary you with all the details of this sad story. It suffices to say that her husband quarrelled with this villain, and words were said which reflected upon her honour. A scene ensued between husband and wife, when she confessed all. How she had been married, had a child, and deceived him from the first."

"And he—what did he do?" said Jack, anxiously.

"He behaved like a true, noble-hearted man. He forgave her all, and pitied her sufferings. He blamed the man who had deceived the innocent girl, not the girl who had been deceived. He did more. He met the man who had attempted to disgrace his wife, and forced him to remain silent as to all he knew. The man was not all bad, and he seemed to repent of what he had done. It is a sad story, is it not?"

Jack was strangely affected by it, and said :

"It is indeed, Lady Melissa," he replied. "But the child—what became of the child?"

"It still lives. The child has become a man, and does not even know who its parents are."

"My case," said Jack. "Does her husband know the child lives?"

"He does not know who the child is," she replied ; "but the mother does."

"And still she does not own him? That is cruel," said Jack.

"She has not long known who and what her child is," said Lady Melissa, in a low voice.

"But now she has discovered him she will surely own him," said Jack. "I know, I feel sure my mother would do so, could she find me out—that's if she is alive."

Lady Melissa stood up, and something in her face seemed to force Jack to rise from his seat also.

Again he felt that strange tremor pass over him. Lady Melissa fixed her eyes on his face with a fond

yearning look, such as only a mother can give to a long-lost child who has been restored to her.

It was a painful situation, and she felt she could not bear the strain much longer.

She came close to Jack, and placing both hands on his shoulders, gazed into his face.

Then she bent her stately head, and kissed him.

He never moved. He could not have moved to save his life. But a feeling of exultation passed over him, a feeling which he could not define.

"Jack," said Lady Melissa ; "I am the girl of my story, and I have found my boy. Jack, oh ! Jack, my darling, can you forgive your unhappy mother ?"

He saw it all now. It flashed across his memory in a second. This accounted for the strange feeling he always experienced in her presence. Forgive her ? His mother. He could hardly comprehend it.

"Is this true ?" he asked, in a strained voice.

"Yes, oh, yes. Do you not feel it is true ?" she asked, in a pained tone.

"Mother," he said, passionately, as he placed his arm around her. "You, my mother. God in Heaven bless you. My dreams have come true, for you were always the good angel in them."

They lingered in a fond embrace, mother and son united after all these years. It was a strange fate had brought them together.

Suddenly Jack said : "But Sir William does not know. Think what I am. It will be a sad blow to him."

"Why," she asked, "are you not my son ?"

"Yes, mother ;" how sweet the word sounded in her ears ; "but I am a jockey ; nothing more."

"What matter? You are an honest man, and have won a good name. Both are better than title or riches."

She placed her arm fondly round his neck, and, as she sat down, he knelt by her side.

They had much to talk about, and time passed quickly.

"It will be better to tell Sir William all," said Jack.

They were so happy with each other they had not noticed the door open nor seen Sir William standing in the room.

"You scoundrel! Lady Melissa, leave the room," thundered Sir William.

They started to their feet in alarm.

Lady Melissa at once saw Sir William had misunderstood the situation. How could he understand it when he knew so little?

Sir William made a step forward and caught Jack by the collar. He raised his heavy hunting crop and was about to bring it down with all his force when Lady Melissa seized his arm.

"William, William," she cried in agony, "you don't know what you are doing. Indeed you don't."

She struggled with him.

"Let go," he said, roughly.

"No, no!" she cried. "William, do you know who he is?" The agonized tone of her voice made him pause.

"He's my jockey," said Sir William.

"And he is MY son," cried Lady Melissa, and then fainted away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

EVENTS PROGRESSING.

WHEN Lady Melissa sank fainting to the ground, Sir William and Jack at once took means to restore her to consciousness. Neither spoke, but devoted their attentions solely to her.

In a short time Lady Melissa heaved a deep sigh, and opened her eyes, which at once rested upon Jack, and then timidly glanced at Sir William.

She was now reclining on the couch, and as she thought of all that had happened she nearly fainted again.

"Do you feel better, Nora?" said Sir William, kindly.

"Yes," she murmured. "I am quite well now. The excitement was too much for me."

Jockey Jack stood away from the couch, and with head bent down seemed lost in thought.

Sir William looked at him with a curious expression. He could hardly comprehend what had happened.

Jack, looking up, noticed Sir William's expression, and made up his mind as to what he should do.

"Sir William," he said, "what you have just heard is the truth. I am Lady Melissa's son. It will never be possible for her to recognize me as such in the

position in which she is placed, as your wife, nor can I wish her to do so. It was my own fault I was cast upon the world, and had I remained with the friends my mother left me with, all would have been well. I must bear the consequences of my folly. It is hard to lose my mother again, after all these years, but it will be for the best. You will permit me to see her occasionally, and the world need never know of the relationship between us."

Lady Melissa was about to speak, when Sir William said :

"No, Jack, that cannot be. It is no fault of yours that you are placed in this position, and as you have a name to which you are entitled, you must bear it. I shall leave it to Lady Melissa and yourself as to what course you will take. For my own part, I have no wish to come between mother and son. So far, you have been honest and trustworthy, and have borne a good name."

They talked together for a considerable time, and at last agreed it would be better to let the matter rest, and make no public announcement. Jack could tell Hettie and the Daltons what had happened, and they would keep silent. When Jack took the name of Gardner—his mother's name before she became Lady Melissa—it would be explained that circumstances had come to light which proved his parentage, and under that name he could get married to Hettie.

Sir William agreed to allow him three hundred a year, an act of generosity that quite overwhelmed Jack and his mother.

Jack saw Ned Dalton first, and explained what

had happened to him. Dalton was fairly taken aback at the news, and at first could hardly believe it possible.

"Well, Jack," he said, "I always fancied you were a good bred 'un, and now to think that Lady Melissa should turn out to be your mother. Sir William's a brick. It's not every man would have taken it in the way he has. Yes, I think it will be better to do as you have arranged, take the name of Gardner, and say nothing more about it. What's been done cannot be undone, and Sir William has behaved very generously. Hettie will be pleased, for she is very fond of you, Jack, and I am sure my little lass will do whatever you think is best. I wouldn't tell Mag at present," said Dalton, dubiously. "You see my respected wife has rather high notions, and she might feel inclined to blow a bit about Hettie marrying Lady Melissa's son. No, all things considered I think we won't put Mrs. D. on the good thing at present."

Jack laughed heartily as he said:

"As you please, Mr. Dalton, it's hardly fair to leave her out in the cold, though, is it?"

"If she doesn't know anything, she can't be tempted to let out stable secrets," said Dalton.

"Hettie, I have something to tell you," said Jack, when they were alone together the same evening.

"What is it, Jack?" she asked; "anything very, very important?"

"Yes, it's very important. I've found out who my mother is, Hettie. I've got a name to give you at last," he said.

Hettie's eyes opened wide with surprise, as she said :

"However did you find her out, Jack ? Oh, I'm so glad. Does she know you ? Tell me all about it ?"

Hettie listened with amazement as Jack told the story of the discovery that Lady Melissa was his mother.

At its conclusion she said :

"You were quite right, Jack, not to insist upon her recognizing you publicly. It would only cause pain when it is needless. I shall know you as her son, and that will be sufficient for me. I have always liked her, now I shall love her very much indeed. I'm quite proud of you, Jack, indeed I am. Yes, it will be better not to tell mother at present. We can explain to her your name is Jack Gardner, and tell her the story you have arranged. She will be pleased you have got a real name, and I believe it was only because you were Jockey Jack she objected to you. I love Jockey Jack, for it is the name I gave you, and you must keep it always, will you not ?"

"If you like, Hettie. We can be married in my real name, but I shall always be known to the world by the one you gave me."

Hettie and Jack were quietly married, and Sir William and Lady Melissa were present at the ceremony.

People said it was extraordinary the interest the baronet and his wife took in Jockey Jack. His real name was now known, but the world in which he lived would not recognize him by any other name than the one he had won fame by.

Jack was now in the foremost rank of jockeys, and had plenty of riding.

Sir William had entered Blue Blood for the Epsom Handicap at the A.J.C. meeting at Sydney, and it was thought the horse had a great chance over a mile, even with his big weight, 9 stone 10 pound. St. Almo was also entered in Marlow's name, and there was a chance of the two cracks meeting over the mile course.

Meanwhile it may be as well just to glance at Toddy Blake's proceedings since he left Melbourne on board the *Aramac* with Detective Hyam close on his heels.

Blake was a fair horseman, and it was not long before he got into a decent stable. He had mounts at most of the suburban meetings, and was lucky enough to win one or two good races.

Detective Hyam was spending rather more time in Sydney than his superiors liked, and he seemed to make no further progress towards the discovery of Potter's murderer. That Blake knew something about it he felt sure, but he could obtain no clue strong enough to work upon.

He had, however, made one important discovery. Reuben Potter's watch had been pawned in Sydney.

When Detective Hyam caught sight of that watch, he fancied his chase would soon be over.

The pawnbroker remembered the man who had pawned it well, and the description was so unlike Blake that the detective at once knew it could not have been the jockey who had done it.

"Toddy" appeared to be well satisfied with himself and the world in general. He had an ample supply of cash, and had won a considerable amount in bets since he left Victoria.

His particular chum was a man well-known on Sydney racecourses named Sol Crux. This man was a backer of horses, and a plunger when he fancied he had a real good thing on.

A clever, dangerous man, Sol Crux, and one not likely to let a chance slip through his fingers. He was in the police force at one time, but had been discharged owing to some suspicion attaching to him in the case of a big burglary at Potts Point. Crux travelled a good deal, and knew most racing men. He became acquainted with Blake by giving him a ten pound note when he had won a considerable sum over one of the jockey's mounts.

Blue Blood had arrived safely under the watchful eye of Ned Dalton, and it was generally known Jockey Jack would have the mount.

Marlow had also come over with St. Almo, and Hector Flushton, hovering like a moth round the candle flame, had come with him.

Crux had met Blake a few days before the A.J.C. Meeting, and being desirous of ascertaining how matters stood, opened fire.

"What do you ride, Toddy?" he asked.

"Red Dick," said Blake. "You know him. He's a brute of a horse to ride. Beastly savage, but I think I can manage him."

"Long price he's at. Don't like him myself. Has he a chance?" asked Crux.

"You take a thousand about him, at hundreds to three," said Blake.

"What makes you fancy him?" said Crux.

"If you don't like to take it, let it alone," said Blake. "You've not parted very freely of late, and I'm getting short of cash. If you want to do yourself a good turn and me too, take that wager."

"You've had a pretty fair percentage of my winnings," said Sol Crux; "and you're not short of cash. What do you want me to back Red Dick for?"

"Because I fancy he'll win," said Blake.

"What about Blue Blood with 9 stone 10lb?" said Crux.

"I'll beat him," said Blake.

"Well, you ought to know, but he's favourite," said Crux; "and I must say I like his chance."

"Blue Blood be ——," said Blake, snappishly. "I rode him in the Newmarket, and I tell you Red Dick can beat him."

"If you think it's as good as that, I'll take the odds," said Crux.

"What do I stand in?" said Blake; "you see the stable haven't any money on yet, and you'll get the cream of the market."

"I'll lay you a hundred to nothing," said Crux.

"That's not enough," said Blake.

"It's all you'll get, and plenty too," said Crux. "I've done you more than one good turn, and run risks over it, too. When I popped that ——"

"Shut up," said Blake. "Don't talk so loud. All right, I'll take the hundred and do my best for you."

Crux took the wager 1,000 to 30 Red Dick, and the leviathan who laid it him smiled as he did so, for no one ever thought the horse had a chance of success.

Toddy Blake seemed somewhat changed since he left Melbourne, despite the good luck he had experienced.

He had evidently something on his mind, and his nerves were none of the strongest, as he drank more brandy than was good for him. He lived at a small house in Surrey Hills, and was quiet and inoffensive enough as a lodger.

The night before the Epsom Handicap Blake could not rest. He tramped up and down his room, muttering to himself and continually harping on one subject.

That subject was Reuben Potter's death.

"Can't get him out of my head," muttered Blake. "He haunts me to-night. I wish I hadn't a mount to-morrow. I don't like that brute Red Dick. He's not a safe 'un. D—— it all, I'm getting as nervous as a baby. I'll have a refresher."

Blake took a stiff pull at a flask of brandy he had on the table.

"That's better. Puts new life into a fellow," he said, smacking his lips.

"I've a presentiment something will happen to-morrow. Never felt like this before. What the deuce can it mean?"

Blake was not a good writer, but he got some paper out of his box, took pen and ink, and wrote slowly and carefully for some considerable time.

When he had finished, he read over what he had written, and it seemed to satisfy him.

"I'm a fool to write that," he said. "If I come back safe to-morrow night I'll burn it. If I don't, well, it won't matter, and it's relieved my mind. I've half a mind to tear it up now," he went on, as he took the papers up; "what if I 'chucked' the mount on Red Dick up. Bah! what a fool I am. Sol's laid me a hundred, and I've got a tenner of my own on. I'll have a good win if——," he started, and looked behind him nervously.

"Thought I heard something," he said.

The wind moaned with a peculiarly, melancholy sound, and Blake, shivering, got into bed, after taking another gulp at the brandy.

"Hang it, I never locked those papers up," he said, and got out of bed again.

He locked them in his box, and turned then in.

He turned restlessly about, and could not sleep. It was not until morning was breaking he dropped into a fitful slumber.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BLAKE'S LAST RIDE.

"YOU'LL meet that fellow Blake to-day," said Dalton to Jockey Jack, as they drove to Randwick course in a hansom. "He rides Red Dick in the Epsom Handicap, and the horse was well backed last night."

"Blake riding, is he?" said Jack. "I don't fear him much with a horse like Blue Blood under me."

"We ought to win. I wired Sir William this morning I thought he would about get home. I'm to put a couple of hundred on for him."

"What sort of a course is Randwick to ride on?" asked Jack.

"Oh, you'll find it all right. Get a good position from the start and keep it, and make a dash for the rails after you enter the straight, that is if you have a good chance of getting through. If not steer a clear course, and come well down the centre," said Dalton.

There was the usual crowd assembled in the paddock when Dalton and Jack arrived, and they were speedily recognized.

Blue Blood had been installed a warm favourite, and not more than five to one could be had about

his chance. St. Almo was backed, and also several of the Sydney horses, among them being Red Dick, who had gradually crept up in the quotations.

Jack went into the jockeys' room to dress, and sat down near Blake, not noticing him at the time.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" said Toddy, as he recognized his old stable mate. "Ride Blue Blood, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Jack. "How have you been getting along?"

"Grand," said Blake. "Had plenty of riding and won two or three good races."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Jack. "You ride Red Dick to-day, don't you?"

"Yes," said Blake. "You have a trifle on him, he's got a good show."

"I've got my bit on Blue Blood, thanks," said Jack; "and I fancy he'll just about win."

"We'll see about that," said Blake. "I hear you're married, are you?"

"Yes," said Jack.

"Well, I wish you luck. You're no particular friend of mine, but I don't want any harm to come to you."

"I would have been a good friend to you, Blake," said Jack, "had you given me the chance."

"I feel a bit queer to-day," said Toddy. "That Red Dick's got a brute of a temper. Dashed if I don't think I'm getting nervous. I must have some brandy before I get up."

"Don't," said Jack. "Wait till the race is over."

"I might not be able to get it then," said Blake,

moodily, as he got up and walked out with his saddle on his arm.

When Blue Blood was being put to rights a large crowd surrounded him, Marlow being among the number.

"Looks a bit light, Dalton," he said.

"Think so?" said Ned, as he braced up the girth.

"Yes, I do. Not half as well as when he ran in the Newmarket," said Marlow.

"Perhaps not," said Dalton. "But he'll beat your horse, anyway."

"Not him," said Marlow, and walked away.

Jack was quickly in the saddle, and Blue Blood evidently on his best behaviour walked about quietly until the bell rang to go to the post.

A field of thirty faced the starter, and over a mile Jack felt he would have all his work cut out to steer a clear course.

He knew that Blue Blood possessed great pace, and he determined to make the most use of it.

After a short delay the flag fell. Jack had been watching Blake before the start, and thought he must have had too much of the brandy he had been talking about, so wild was the look in his eyes. Jack kept Blue Blood well in the centre, and watched his opportunity.

On they swept, the whole of the big field well together. As they turned into the straight Jack saw an opening on the rails and shot in. The horse going alongside him was Red Dick. He saw Blake's face was pale as death, and felt his mount was closing him on to the rails.

Surely Blake could not intend to ride him down! It might kill them both! What could it mean?

On they went. The pace was terrific. Horse after horse fell back, and at the distance Blue Blood held a slight advantage.

How the crowd roared the favourite's name! "Blue Blood wins!" came from thousands of throats.

Jack felt he had the race safe, but he could not shake off Red Dick.

As they reached the half distance Jack looked sideways at Blake, and he saw a sight that fairly made his blood creep, and momentarily made him lose his head and almost the race, for Blue Blood eased in his stride.

"What the devil's up with Jack?" said Dalton, as he saw the horse falter.

Well might Jack be forgiven for that slight mistake!

The glance he had rapidly given showed Toddy Blake with eyes set in a glassy stare, his teeth clenched, and his cheeks a ghastly hue. He kept glancing behind him and bending forward as though he saw something at his back.

Jack fancied he heard him cry out, "Help, help, he's after me!" and he saw the blood flowing from Red Dick's side. The horse, he felt sure, was now almost as mad as the rider.

It was a horrible sensation Jack experienced, but in another moment he had set Blue Blood going again, and was racing hard for the winning-post.

He could hear Red Dick thundering after him, and Toddy Blake uttering wild, weird cries.

Never in his life had Jack been so unnerved. Another glance and he saw Blake was madly spurring his horse, and Red Dick was gaining on Blue Blood.

It was now or never, and Jack raised his whip and rode Blue Blood desperately. The gallant horse responded, and amid shouts of joy from his numerous backers Sir William's horse passed the box a good half length in front of Red Dick.

But what was this solemn hush in the crowd?

Something was wrong. No need to tell Jack what it was.

As he eased Blue Blood, Blake on Red Dick shot past him at full gallop.

Jack saw Blake was either mad or drunk, for the jockey was still riding the horse furiously.

"Stop, Blake! For God's sake, stop!" shouted Jack. "Are you mad?"

A demoniac yell was the only answer, as Blake, with another wild shout, lashed furiously behind him with his whip.

The horses had filed into the weighing enclosure, but no order was given to dismount.

Everyone was, as it were, spell-bound, and all eyes were fixed on a solitary horseman racing madly round the course alone.

A deep silence had fallen on the crowd, and even the judge forgot to place the second and third horses' numbers on the board, so intense was the excitement.

"He's mad! The fellow's mad! He'll be killed, sure as fate!" and such-like expressions were heard whispered about.

Jockey Jack sat stock still on Blue Blood, and even the horses seemed to know something dreadful was about to take place.

Thousands of people were intently watching the horse and rider careering along the far side of the course.

On, on came Red Dick in a wild gallop. Round the turn he flew like a swallow, and tore madly down the straight.

"They're both mad!" yelled the crowd.

"Great Heavens! look at him!" said Dalton, who was at Blue Blood's head.

It was indeed a terrible sight.

Toddy Blake had now let go the reins, and was clutching at his throat as though he was being strangled to death.

He still had a firm grip on the saddle, but his strength seemed to be giving way.

His face was convulsed, and it was quite evident some hidden terror had driven him mad.

And Red Dick—what of him? The horse seemed as mad as the rider. His flanks streamed with blood, and blood and foam covered his chest. As he neared the winning-post Red Dick commenced to falter.

"They'll be killed!" shrieked the crowd. "See, the horse has broken a blood-vessel. He'll fall in a minute!"

With breathless expectancy the vast concourse of

people awaited the result, which now seemed inevitable.

Blake was evidently oblivious to his danger, and he appeared to be laughing in an idiotic manner and chattering to himself.

At last Red Dick made one more effort. The gallant horse, ridden by a maniac to his death, struggled bravely on.

A dull, sickening thud. A loud, wild, terrible cry, and Red Dick and his rider rolled over and over on the ground nearly opposite the winning-post, where Jockey Jack a few moments before had ridden the favourite to victory.

Horse and rider seemed to be heaped together in one battered mass.

Red Dick struggled for a few moments, and then lay still, with Blake under him.

Willing hands quickly extricated the unfortunate jockey, and carried him into the accident room.

As for poor Red Dick, he lay gasping out his last breath on the track.

Blake was not quite dead. He was a fearful sight to look at. A mangled mass of broken bones and bruised flesh, and his face almost beyond recognition.

The jockeys had been weighed in, and Jack at once went across the paddock to see Blake. A passage was made for him, and he went in.

There lay poor Toddy dying in mortal agony. Agony of mind as well as body, so the doctor said.

"Do you know him?" asked the doctor, turning to Jack.

"Yes, poor fellow!" said Jack. "Is he mad, Doctor?"

"I can't make him out. He's had a terrible fright. No; I hardly think he's mad now, but he has only a few moments to live."

Blake's eye—he had lost one—looked at Jack.

He bent over the bruised, mangled form.

"Poor old chap! I'm awfully sorry, Toddy. Bear up, old fellow," said Jack, in a husky voice.

"It drove me mad," muttered Blake. "It sat behind me all the way. I couldn't get away from it!"

"What was it?" said Jack.

"A ghost," said Blake, faintly; "his ghost."

"What ghost?" said Jack, in a whisper.

"Reuben Potter," said Blake.

Jack started, and looked with horror at Blake.

"Reuben Potter!" said Jack. "What had you to do with Reuben Potter?"

"I,—I,—I,"—groaned Blake. A gurgling sound came from his throat, he gave one great gasp, and then all was still.

Toddy Blake was dead. He had ridden his last race, and now his troubles were ended.

Jack walked sorrowfully away. As he went across the paddock a country-looking man accosted him.

"Jockey dead?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jack.

"Friend of yours, I believe?"

"I knew him," said Jack.

"Do you know me?"

"No," said Jack.

"I'm Detective Hyam. I've been employed in that Reuben Potter case. I fancy that unfortunate fellow knew more about it than he cared to tell."

"Did he?" said Jack. He did not think it was any business of his to tell the detective what he had fancied poor Blake meant.

"Excuse me, but did he say anything to you?" said Hyam.

"He did," said Jack.

"Might I ask what it was? It's most important," said Hyam.

"He said he fancied something was riding behind him in the race, and it drove him mad," said Jack.

"Oh," said Hyam, significantly. "Thank you. Nothing more?"

"Not of importance," said Jack, as he passed on.

"Now I'll bet a crown Blake told him a good deal more," said Hyam. "Well, never mind, my friend, I don't want you to split on a pal, even if he is dead. But must have a look round Master Blake's lodgings. Oh dear yes. He may have left a will behind him, or something of that sort."

Detective Hyam at once left the course, and made for Blake's lodgings. He knew where he lived well, for he had watched him home on more than one occasion."

He knocked at the door, and explained his mission to the horrified landlady.

"Poor dear lad. Such a quiet, well-behaved one, too. Never gave the slightest trouble," and she dropped a silent tear. Not many were shed for Toddy Blake. "Ah, he was a good fellow," said

Hyam. "We never know a man's real worth until he's gone. Might I see his room? He may have left some papers of importance there."

"Certainly," said the good woman, as she showed Hyam into Blake's room.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll just see his things are all right, and will send for them to-morrow. It will be as well to let his parents have them."

When the woman left Hyam had a look round.

He tried Blake's box and found it locked. "I must open you," he thought.

He took out a bunch of keys, and soon found one to fit.

He opened the box and turned the things over.

"Ah, what's this?" he said, as he took up the paper Blake had been writing on the night before. "I'll have a read at this, it looks interesting."

He opened the package, and when he saw the first few lines gave a start of surprise, and then settled himself down to read the document through.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BLAKE'S CONFESSION.

THE document Blake had written explained several things connected with this story. Detective Hyam read as follows:—

“Somehow or other to-night I feel depressed, and fearful of what may happen to-morrow. I am to ride Red Dick in the Epsom Handicap, and he has a brute of a temper. I don't half like the job, and have a good mind to throw it over at the last moment.

“Just before I sat down to write these lines strange sounds seemed to fill the room, and an unseen presence made me shudder with fear. I distinctly heard a voice, but what it said, and whose it was, I could not make out—probably it was someone outside, but it sounded very strange.

“I cannot get rid of the feeling, even while I am writing, that Red Dick will be my last mount. Feeling as I now do, I am about to write a confession, for I should not like to die and leave certain things unrevealed.

“To commence at the beginning. I shall not mention names nor implicate any one. How I got the mount on Blue Blood in the Newmarket is well known. I was a member of the jockey ring that

met at the Brightside Inn, and so were the Cases, and others. Lambton was not, nor was Jockey Jack. It was arranged that we should all ride in the interests of Percussion, as he had beaten St. Almo in his trial. I fancied I could win on Blue Blood, but knew it would be easier to lose on him, so I thought I would ride stiff if Percussion was winning, and if not, I would win on Blue Blood if possible.

"It was a dangerous game, as any good jockey knows, because I might not be able to get Blue Blood up in time, even if Percussion could not win. In the race I saw St. Almo make the pace as I thought, Lambton thought, and all of us thought, for Percussion. We soon found out our mistake. St. Almo kept going, and when I saw he could win, I let Blue Blood go, and he shot past Percussion like a dart, but could not get up to St. Almo, although he was catching him fast at the finish. I could have won the race on Blue Blood easily. I lost a good bit of money, and was riled at loosing when I knew I could have won.

"I found out that Reuben Potter and the Cases had sold us all, and made a pile of money. I met Potter and asked him what I was to get, and he swore at me and said what I deserved for pulling a horse, 'Nothing.' I was mad with rage at him, and vowed I would have my revenge.

"All Sunday and Monday I drank heavily, and on Monday night I was at 'The Diamonds,' and had a good deal of champagne, but was not drunk. As I walked home I met Reuben Potter not a hundred yards from his doorway. He was drunk, very drunk,

and rolled about a good deal. He knew me, however, and commenced to blackguard me. I swore back at him, and he tried to hit me, but could not. I kept laughing at him, and he nearly choked with rage, and I thought he would have a fit. His eyes seemed to start out of his head, and he went purple in the face. I could see him quite plainly, because he was near a gas lamp. At last he staggered off, but before he did so he pulled out a bag of money, and a roll of notes and said: 'See them, my boy. You'd like 'em, wouldn't you? Won 'em to-night. Little fortune, isn't there? You should always act square, and you'd get on as well as I do.'

"A thought came over me. If I could only get that money it would set me up, and serve Potter out for his shabbiness. I watched him, and saw him enter his gate, and then ran quietly after him. I heard him fumble about on the verandah, and then heard him sit down in a chair. In a few moments I crept close up to the creepers on the verandah, and could hear him breathing heavily. There was no doubt he was in a sound, drunken sleep. I thought how I could best get at him, and as I crept along the side of the verandah I felt a rope stretched across from one support to the other to hold a kind of woodwork up. I thought it would be fun to bind him fast in the chair and take his money. I cut the rope, and walked on to the verandah. Potter's heavy breathing had ceased, and I wondered if he was awake. To make sure, I touched his leg, but he never moved. I could hardly see his face, but he seemed to me to have his eyes open, and I felt afraid,

Then I thought I'll put the rope round his neck a couple of times and tie it to the chair. I did so, and Potter never stirred all the time, and I could not hear him breathing, which I thought strange for a man in a drunken sleep. I did not twist the cord very tight, because I fancied it might choke him, but I left the rope tied to the back of the chair so that I could tighten it in a moment if he stirred. I put his handkerchief over his face to keep the moonlight from his eyes, as the reflection now seemed to come that way. I then felt in his pockets. I got the notes and his bag, and then took his watch and chain, thinking I might as well make a clean sweep of it. I knew it was a hundred to one I should never be suspected, being so small, and unable to cope with a man of Potter's strength. When I had fleeced him of all I could find I thought I'd have a look at him. I lifted the handkerchief from his face, and——

"I can hardly write. Drops of perspiration keep falling on the paper, and I fancied I heard a moan in the room. It must have been the wind, but it sounded just like a groan.

"When I raised the handkerchief from Potter's face I nearly fainted with terror. He was staring at me with his eyes wide open and protruding from their sockets almost the same as they had done in the street when I met him. His face was blue, and where I had put the rope round his neck seemed to have swelled. A horrible thought came to me. Had I strangled him in his sleep? No, no, I never meant that, and yet he seemed dead! Oh, the horror of that moment! It all comes back to me

now as I write. Something seems to touch my shoulder as I sit here, and I dare not look behind. It must be fancy, but it is terrible! I can hardly hold the pen, and yet some unseen power compels me to write." (Here the writing became very irregular. Hyam had some difficulty in making it out.)

"What was I to do? Was he dead? I pinched him hard, and then pricked him with my knife, but he never moved. Yes, he was dead, there could be no doubt about that. But had I strangled him? To this very minute I am in fearful doubt about it. I swear to Heaven I never intended to kill Potter. It may have been madness to tie the rope round his neck, but I did not think it would choke him. I cannot help thinking Potter was dead when I put the rope round his neck, or nearly so. He looked bad in the street. I was sure the rope was not tight when I put it round Potter's neck, for I felt it. Might it not have been tightened by the swelling of the throat? I should like whoever finds these lines to get a doctor's opinion on what I have written. I feel like a murderer now, and I felt so then, but Heaven knows I never meant to kill Reuben Potter. I have been in a terrible state of doubt and uncertainty ever since that fatal night. The awful face of Reuben Potter as he lay back in that chair has haunted me ever since, and I have drank heavily to deaden the sense of terror that hangs about me. It is a relief for me to write this, although it costs me a great effort. I had the money in my pockets, and the watch. I never thought of the watch until I had got away or I should not have taken it with me.

"The consequences of what would happen to me if I was found near Potter's house suddenly struck me. I should be accused of murder! The very thought made me shudder. There was no help for it now. What had happened could not be undone, whether I had strangled him or not. No one would believe Potter died before I put the rope round his neck, although I now swear I believe he did. I put the handkerchief over his face and was about to undo the rope when I fancied I heard footsteps. There was no time to be lost. I crept along the grass to the gate and peered out. It was moderately light now, and I could see no one about. I pushed the gate open, and once into the street terror seemed to possess me again. I ran as hard as I could, and I felt my teeth chattering with fright and excitement. Where I ran to I hardly know, but I ran on and on until I left the place far behind. I wandered about until it was seven o'clock, and then called at a small eating-house for some breakfast. Where it was I don't know. I was almost dazed, and hardly knew what I was doing. After that I wondered where I should secrete the money I had got, and the watch and chain. At last I thought it would be best to brave it out, and I went into a shop, bought a second-hand portmanteau and a few clothes to put in it. I then called a cab and drove down to the Federal Coffee Palace, where I took a bedroom for a week.

"As I shut the door and locked it I heard a voice, which I recognized as Marlow's. I knew there was ill blood between Marlow and Potter, but I never thought of trying to place the blame on Marlow then.

"I did not see Marlow again at the Federal. The news of Potter's murder spread quickly, and I heard it talked about on all sides. I counted the cash I had stolen, and there was over six hundred pounds—I forget the exact sum—but there was fifty pounds in sovereigns, and the rest in notes, which I cashed at intervals. I went to the races and met Marlow there."

Detective Hyam then went on to read an account of what took place on the Australian Cup day, with which the reader is already acquainted, and also of Blake's trip to Sydney. The document concludes as follows :

"I have no more to say. I feel my ride on Red Dick will be my last, and yet I know I must take it. If this is published I hope the public will think as well of me as they can, for I do most solemnly swear I never meant to injure Reuben Potter, even if the rope I put round his neck did strangle him. I wish I could have the satisfaction of solving the mystery as to whether he was dead before I did it, but that can never be. Who will find this I don't know, nor do I care. I hope the people I have ever wronged will forgive me, and if I had my time to come over again I would do different. Potter's watch and chain were pawned for me in Sydney at ——. All the money I got is spent, and I have only a few pounds left. That is all I have to say."

The document was signed "T Blake."

"This is a rum 'un," said Detective Hyam, as he put the papers in his pocket. "Now I shouldn't wonder if there isn't some truth in what he has

written about Potter being dead before he put the rope round his neck. There are more unlikely things than that. I must have a good medical man's opinion on that point. So it was Blake, after all. Knew it was all the time, but couldn't get at him. At any rate, it will show I was on the right track, and the others were wrong. I guess it will be a bit of a relief to Marlow."

Detective Hyam thanked the landlady for permitting him to inspect Blake's room. She thought what a nice man poor Mr. Blake's friend was. She was rather surprised, however, when no one claimed her late lodger's goods, but she took possession of them, and in due time utilized them as best she could. Hyam went back to Melbourne, and handed in his report, with Blake's confession attached, to his chief.

The document was printed in the papers, and created almost as great a sensation as the murder did at the time it was committed.

But was it murder after all?

The doctors differed on the subject. Was there ever a subject upon which doctors did not differ?

Public opinion was also divided on the question, but Ned Dalton's remark will probably be endorsed by the reader. Ned said to Jockey Jack, when talking the affair over:

"The poor beggar's dead, Jack! Don't let's think too bad of him now he's gone. Let's give him the benefit of the doubt."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WAY TO DUSKY DEATH.

IT was with daily increasing anxiety Sir William noticed his wife growing gradually paler, and evidently sinking into a decline.

Lady Melissa knew she was dying. As she looked back over her past life she sometimes wondered how she had lived through it all. She shuddered at the thought of what she had endured in her first short married life. But when Sir William's kindness came to her mind it compensated for all, and the exquisite knowledge that he loved her so well soothed her.

Sir William had changed much since Dr. Henry had given him the fatal answer to his question.

"Will she die?"

No, it was not an answer. It was a look, but Sir William understood it.

Gradually Lady Melissa sank, and her pale face and glittering eyes, her breath coming and going in deep sobs, and her weak voice indicated she was not long for this world.

It was a glorious moonlight night. The moon's silvery light shone down with reflected softening splendour on the sleeping city.

Peace was all around, and as Sir William opened the window and looked out a flood of light shone into the room.

Lady Melissa had a few moments before asked him to put out the light, as she felt inclined to sleep a little.

He stooped down and kissed her lips.

Then he suddenly started back, and his face turned white. It was the kiss of death.

He could not speak. He could not move. He stood there motionless in a great dumb agony. In those few moments he lived a lifetime.

Old Marks had a troublous night. He could not sleep. When he dozed off he seemed to wake up with a start.

He lay thinking of the trouble that was coming on the house, and on his master. Faithful old Marks would have given his life to save his master pain. As he lay quiet he fancied he heard a cry.

He sat up and listened. All was still and quiet. He must have been mistaken. No mistake this time, at any rate. He heard a heavy fall and a moan, and it was in the room directly over him where Lady Melissa lay.

Old Marks was no coward, but his heart palpitated rapidly as he hurried up the stairs with a light in his hand.

The door was locked.

"Sir William, are you there?" said Marks.

No answer. All silent as the grave.

Marks knocked louder. What could that heavy fall mean?

Downstairs went Marks and got his keys. One of them might possibly fit.

He tried several, and at last found one that went right in, and he heard a key fall out inside the room.

He opened the door and went quietly in. At first he could see nothing particular, for his eyes were none of the best, but as they became accustomed to the gloom he saw Lady Melissa asleep, as he thought, on the couch.

Then he saw something on the floor, and kneeling down he felt, and knew it was Sir William.

"Master, Sir William. What are you doing here?" he said, in a broken voice.

No answer.

Marks became alarmed.

"He's in a dead faint," he thought. Reaching for the bell he rang it loudly, and assistance was quickly at hand.

Sir William was placed on the bed, and a servant despatched for Dr. Henry.

"How quietly my lady sleeps," said old Marks.

The servants looked at him. They felt that it was indeed a quiet sleep, the sleep of death, but they had a great respect for old Marks, and did not wish to alarm him.

Dr. Henry came. One glance at Lady Melissa told him all, and he at once turned his attention to Sir William.

"This is bad," he said; "he's had a terrible shock. Clear the room, Marks."

Marks quietly asked the others to retire.

"Is he very bad, sir?" asked the old man.

"Very," said Dr. Henry.

"My lady sleeps well," said Marks.

Dr. Henry looked at him, and said solemnly, "She does."

His tone alarmed Marks, and he looked at her fixedly.

"She is dead," said Dr. Henry.

The poor old man fell on his knees, and sobbed like a child.

"Come, Marks, Sir William will need all your care," said the doctor; "his brain has given way under the shock. We shall have to fight hard to pull him through."

He had touched Marks in the right spot. The old man roused himself at once, and did all he could to render assistance.

When Sir William recovered consciousness he was delirious, and knew nothing of what was passing around him.

And his wife lay dead in the same room. Dr. Henry knew he would have a hard struggle in Sir William's case.

News was at once sent to Dalton, and Jack and he came over immediately.

"Sir William will not be able to attend the funeral," said Dr. Henry. "You will, perhaps, see to the arrangements," he said to Dalton. "I ask you because Sir William has so few friends he would care to undertake the task. I will assist you myself, if you wish."

Jack was overcome with grief, and Dr. Henry wondered at it. As he looked at the jockey, he saw

what an extraordinary likeness he bore to Lady Melissa. He thought a good deal, but he was a cautious, discreet man, and held his peace.

Lady Melissa's body was removed into another room. Jack followed.

Marks would have kept all out, but Dr. Henry, drawing him on one side, said, "Let him go in."

Dalton gave him a grateful look, but Jack seemed to walk mechanically, like one in a dream.

He entered the room and looked with tear-stained eyes on the mother he had known for such a brief time.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THOUGH LOST TO SIGHT TO MEMORY DEAR.

SIR WILLIAM'S recovery was slow. Gradually he regained his strength, and was able to hear the particulars of his wife's funeral, and of his own illness.

During the time he lay at death's door Jockey Jack was a constant attendant at his bedside, and Sir William never seemed so contented as when he was near him. Hettie, too, shared in the task of nursing Sir William, and her assistance was invaluable. Dr. Henry said she had mistaken her vocation. She ought not to have embraced matrimony, but the medical profession in a nursing capacity.

The first day Sir William was in his study after his illness Jack came and sat with him.

They talked long and earnestly of Lady Melissa's end, and both of them were visibly affected. Still the conversation did good, and relieved their pent-up feelings.

"Jack, I've no children, and I shall never marry again," said Sir William ; "I have been thinking the matter over, and I know it would have pleased Nora, had she lived"—his voice quivered—"to see you acknowledged by me as her legitimate son. Stay, my boy," he went on, as Jack was about to speak ; "it is true, and only natural. The proofs of her former marriage are in my possession, the certificate

of her first husband's death, and also of your identity. No one, to look at the miniature, could doubt it for one moment. Had she lived, it would have been necessary for the world to know you were her son. She is dead, and that alters the question. I can adopt you as a son and heir. The world can say what it likes. I am careless of its opinion. I have very little to live for now. What do you say, Jack ?”

“What can I say ?” said Jack ; “your kindness overwhelms me. If you desire me to bear your name, I shall consider it too great an honour, and one I am not worthy of. Have you considered what the world—your world—will say ?”

“It matters not what is said, Jack,” replied Sir William. “Will you accept what I offer you ?”

“I will,” said Jack ; “and shall consider you have thrown a great responsibility upon me.”

And so Jockey Jack, the homeless little wanderer of the streets, saved from an early death by Ned Dalton, became the adopted son and heir of Sir William Melissa, much to the surprise of the community at large.

Lady Melissa's death was a heavy trial to Sir William. Constant brooding over his loss gradually told on him, and Dr. Henry advised that he should travel abroad, take a long sea voyage, and recruit his shattered health.

He had a furious argument with Sir William over the proposed change, and at last the worthy man lost his temper, and said :

“Sir William, I warn you for the last time. You will go mad if you stay in this house, or this city. I have fought a hard battle to save your life once, and

now you are repaying me by bringing upon yourself an affliction which will be a thousand times worse than death. Be a man. Brave it out, and do as I order you."

At last Sir William was convinced. He determined to go away, and thought a tour in Europe would do him good.

Jack was sorry to part with him, for he had grown to love him as a father, and their mutual affection for the lost woman gave them many feelings in common.

Ned Dalton was also grieved at losing Sir William, but as he knew it was all for the best, he encouraged him in his decision.

"Ned, you must sell all my horses," said Sir William. "I shan't want them again. I don't expect I shall ever return."

"Oh yes you will," said Dalton, in a cheery voice; "I'm going to train a Cup winner for a Melissa yet."

Sir William smiled faintly as he said:

"If ever I do return, Ned, be sure you shall have a try."

"That's right, Sir William. You will come back to us a new man. I'll put the horses up for auction, and bid for one or two of them myself."

"Blue Blood, I suppose," said Sir William.

"Perhaps. There's one or two of your youngsters I like, and I can't afford to give the price Blue Blood will fetch."

Before he sailed Sir William gave Jack a cheque for a thousand pounds, and arranged for his allowance to be five hundred a year.

"I don't want you to ride professionally now you are a Melissa," he said to Jack; "but you will easily

be able to keep a few horses, and may ride your own occasionally."

Sir William was gone, and Ned Dalton had the horses owned by him duly advertised.

"Shall you buy Blue Blood?" said Jack to Dalton.

"No, my lad. He'll be a cut above my figure. He'll fetch a thousand if we've luck, and, by Jove! he's worth it.

"A thousand?" said Jack.

"Yes, that's about the figure," said Dalton.

"Curious," thought Jack, "that's just the amount of the cheque Sir William gave me. If he doesn't fetch more I'll buy him myself. What a surprise it will be for Dalton."

The sale brought together a large crowd of well-known horse owners and trainers. Most of the colts fetched their full price, and Dalton secured two of the most promising.

When Blue Blood, the sensational horse, was led into the ring there was a short burst of applause.

Bidding was brisk, and Marlow, who evidently had a commission to buy him, had gone up to seven hundred guineas. At this price he stood for some little time, but gradually rose to 800 guineas.

Jack was standing looking on, and had not made a bid.

Dalton had gone away to look after the others that were to be offered for sale.

"No advance?" said the auctioneer. "It's against you, Mr. Marlow."

"Fifty," said Marlow.

"Make it level," came from another quarter.

"Nine hundred guineas is a bid," said the

auctioneer. "He's going, gentlemen, and dirt cheap. There's a Melbourne Cup in that horse yet."

He was about to drop the hammer when Jack said loud enough for all to hear :

"A thousand guineas for him, and no more."

"Let him have him," said several voices.

The auctioneer did not hesitate long. Down went the hammer, and Jockey Jack had become the owner of Blue Blood.

"Who's got him, Jack?" said Dalton, bristling up.

"One of your friends," said Jack. "He'll not go out of the stable."

"Who the devil is it? Be quick."

"I've bought him," said Jack.

"You?" said Dalton, with such an expression of blank astonishment on his countenance that Jack burst out laughing.

"Where the deuce did you get the money from? What did he fetch?" said Dalton.

"A thousand guineas, and here's the money," said Jack, showing Sir William's cheque, which he had not yet cashed. "He made me a present of that before he left," he went on. "I thought I could not do better than invest it in his old favourite, and mine, and I didn't want Blue Blood to go out of the stable."

"We've had a rattling good sale," said Ned Dalton, as he sat with Jack, Hettie, and Mrs. Dalton at a good substantial meal at Hairbell Cottage.

"I'm glad of that, Ned," said Mrs. Dalton. "Who bought Blue Blood?"

"Father, of course," said Hettie. "He could never allow him to go out of our stable."

"Then father didn't, of course," said Dalton, with

a smile. "He can't afford to throw away a thousand guineas on a horse like Blue Blood."

"Throwing away a thousand guineas, is it?" said Hettie, indignantly. "Why, dear old Blue Blood's worth three times that, isn't he, Jack?"

"No, I don't think he's worth quite that, Hettie," said Jack. "You see a thousand is a lot of money."

"It's a shame, that's what it is," said Hettie, almost crying. "If it hadn't been for Blue Blood we should not have been married."

"Blue Blood doesn't leave our stable at all, although I don't own him."

"Oh, father," said Hettie. "But who bought him?"

Dalton looked at Jack, and Jack looked at Dalton.

"He's the culprit," said Dalton. "Jack bought Blue Blood, the extravagant young dog. I shall have to keep him and his family, if——"

"Ned," said Mrs. Dalton, sternly, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Hettie blushed. Then she sprang up, and putting her arms round Jack's neck, kissed him and said:

"You dear, good boy. I know you bought Blue Blood for my sake. I'll never, never, never, be cross with you again."

"Nonsense, Hettie. Don't make rash promises," said Mrs. Dalton. "It does 'em good to get taken down now and again."

"I guess you've been let down a peg this time," said Dalton, laughing.

"Ned, you're incorrigible. What ever induced me to marry you at all, I can't make out," said Mrs. Dalton.

"It's been a matter of surprise to me all my life

that you took compassion on my forlorn state," said Ned. Mrs. Dalton thought it would be better to drop the conversation.

"But where did you get all the money, Jack?" said Hettie.

Then he told her how Sir William had given him the cheque, and what he thought when her father said Blue Blood ought to fetch a thousand.

"I knew he was a good judge," said Jack, "and I don't think he's dear."

"No, he's a cheap horse," said Dalton. "He'll win even with a heavy weight up, and in the best company."

So Blue Blood remained in his old quarters, and was now the property of the jockey who had ridden him to victory.

"Jack, my lad," said Dalton, "I've been having a think. I've got a proposal to make."

"What is it?" said Jack.

"I want you to go into partnership with me. You see, I'm getting on a bit now, and I want someone to help me. As you're my son-in-law it's only natural you should be the man."

"Ah, Mr. Dalton, I owe all my good fortune to you," said Jack.

"And Hettie," said Ned. "If she hadn't remembered you that night I found you in the street, I should probably have driven home and left you there."

"God bless her," said Jack, "and you, too. Say what you like, Mr. Dalton, you have been a true friend to me, and I can never repay your kindness."

"Be good to my lass, and true to yourself, and I'll be repaid enough," said Dalton.

CHAPTER XL.

AND LAST.

THE story is well nigh ended, and Jockey Jack's history has been related. Jockey Jack is happy with Hettie, and they are a loving couple. They reside at Hairbell Cottage with the old folk, and agree well together, although Mrs. Dalton occasionally lets her tongue run riot until pulled up by her husband with a jerk.

Jack finds settling down to a trainer's life an occupation after his own heart, and he has plenty of riding at exercise, and is occasionally seen in the saddle at local meetings on one of his own or Ned Dalton's horses. His popularity is the fruit of a well-spent young life, and no man more favourably known on the racecourse.

Jack's opinion is worth having, and he is reckoned a shrewd judge of a horse, and the right man to consult when making a purchase. Hector Flushton cannot quite rid himself of old associations. He still hangs on to Marlow's stable, although since Lady Melissa's death he has been a changed man. Flushton seemed touched with remorse, and he could not get rid of the idea that he had, to a certain extent, been the cause of Lady Melissa's sudden end. He knew he had tried her sorely as few women have been tried, and the strain put upon her

evidently broke her down. Marlow found him a much more tractable companion now, and Flushton's quiet demeanour seemed to have a good effect on the trainer.

Both had received a hard knock over the Newmarket, but still they had sufficient funds left to weather the storm and make a fresh start. Marlow could not forget his little tricks, and he still readied up a few horses to gull the public, but his proceedings were not on a large scale, and consequently were comparatively harmless.

Tom Case married Lily Flowers, and it was rumoured Tom had found his master, and that the Hebe of the Brightside Inn kept her husband well in hand.

They were, however, not an ill-matched pair. Tom looked forward to taking over the Brightside Inn at no distant date, for old Peter Flowers had been going the pace, and gout and other ailments began to tell on his strong constitution.

Sir William reached London safely, and after a short stay, wrote to Jack saying he had gone to the South of France, and meant to remain there for some time. He did not think he should ever return.

"Poor fellow," said Jack, "he feels his loss very deeply."

"He was a good husband, Jack," said Hettie. "Not many men would have been so thoughtful for others as he proved to be."

"I think he'll return when he gets over it," said Jack. "I hope he will come back."

"And so do I, Jack," said Hettie.

"Jack, come here quick!" shouted Dalton from the back of the house.

"What's up now?" said Jack, as he ran out into the yard.

"There's a fellow here says he knows you, and he's quite sure you'll give him a helping hand now you're up in the world."

The individual claiming Jack's acquaintancc did not look very prepossessing. His clothes were tattered, and his face looked haggard and his eyes hungry. A battered old top hat was perched jauntily on one side of his shaggy head, and round his neck he had a dirty handkerchief that had once been blue.

"Don't remember you," said Jack. "What's your name?"

"I'm a bit altered since them days," said the man, "when you was a youngster, and I used to take care of you and share the same cask, or doorstep, or whatever we could get."

"Why, it's not——" commenced Jack.

"Yes it is. I'm the Fairy," said the man.

"Poor old fellow," said Jack, taking his hand; "I know you now. You were a good friend to me when I was a little chap, and I'll see you don't want any more. I know what it is to be hard up, and when Mr. Dalton took me in hand I was nearly starving to death."

"So you know him?" said Ned Dalton. "I fancied it was a put-up job."

"It's all right," said Jack, and then whispering in Dalton's ear, he said:

"We must take him on here. He'll work hard, and he's been used to horses."

"What will the Missus say?" said Ned.

"Probably what she said when I came," replied Jack, with a laugh.

"Come into the kitchen and have something to eat," said Dalton, and "The Fairy," nothing loth, followed.

After satisfying his hunger he related his adventures since he left his little mate, Jack, and when they heard how he had seen Toddy Blake run past him on the night of Potter's death, and his encounter with the constable, they laughed heartily.

"So you're Bob Tomlin, eh?" said Ned Dalton.

"Those blessed police looked high and low for you for weeks after Potter went off. Where did you get to?"

"Skedaddled," said Bob Tomlin, for such was the Fairy's name. "Made tracks for Sydney and then to Queensland."

"Should you like to remain here and help in the stables?" said Jack.

"You bet," said Bob.

"Then you shall," said Dalton, "and if you behave yourself we'll see what we can do for you."

Bob Tomlin had heard the particulars of Jockey Jack's story, and concluded it was the little fellow he had known in the early days. He made it his business to see into the matter for himself, and thus fate had drawn the two old chums in adversity together once more.

Mrs. Dalton was highly indignant at Bob being

taken on when no help was required, but of course she had to give way.

Blue Blood was receiving a grand preparation for the Melbourne Cup, and Bob Tomlin was installed as his attendant.

As Jack watched "The Fairy," grooming his favourite down he could not help thinking of the time when Blue Blood was his especial care, and how Hettie had looked at him as he was at his work.

He had much to be thankful for, and he was not ungrateful. His young life had been full of hardships and sorrows, but bright days dawned, and he was very, very happy.

"Bob, it's only a few months ago I looked after Blue Blood," he said, "and now he's my horse."

"Yes, you've had good luck," said Bob. "I always knew you'd get on. You was such a quiet, decent little chap, so different from the rest of 'em. I knowed you was a good bred 'un. You had it in you from the jump."

Jacked laughed as he said, "If it hadn't been for you, old fellow, I might have been dead years ago."

"Nonsense," said Bob. "You'd pluck enough if you were a little 'un to keep a giant alive."

Blue Blood took a great fancy to his new groom, and Bob and the horse were fast friends.

"He'll win the Cup," said Bob, eyeing him with an air of pride.

"I hope so," said Jack. "I mean to ride him myself."

"Then it's a moral," said Bob, so solemnly that Jack had to laugh again.

"I'm not such a great jockey, you know, Bob," he said. "If he wins it will be the horse more than myself."

* * * *

It was November, and the dull, dead light of an English day seemed to cast a shadow over the great city

Sir William Melissa sat in his club before a warm fire.

He had returned to London, finding the society of a few friends more pleasant than wandering alone about the Continent.

He looked better for the change, and had regained to a great extent his former strength. He thought of the land he had left, and as he looked out of the window he shivered at the prospect.

Why should he not return to Australia? It would have taken very little to ensure his doing so in his present frame of mind.

"A telegram for you Sir William!"

He took it from the man, and then noticing it was a cablegram, opened it hurriedly, and read:

"Blue Blood won Cup. Jack rode. Dalton."

"Bravo!" he almost shouted.

"You seem pleased, Sir William," said a club acquaintance. "Any good news?"

"Yes; read that."

"What cup is it? Is Blue Blood your horse?"

"It's the Melbourne Cup, and Blue Blood *was* my horse," said Sir William.

"I congratulate you. Didn't know they raced much over there."

Sir William looked at him smilingly, and said :

"They can't teach us Australians much about racing here."

Sir William sent a cablegram in reply.

It duly reached Hairbell Cottage.

"Here you are," said Dalton. "By Jove! that's coming it. John Melissa, Esq. I'll have to take a back seat now."

Jack laughed as he opened the missive.

"What does it say? Who is it from?" asked Hettie.

"Listen," said Jack. "It's from Sir William. He says,—

"'Congratulate you all. Returning after Christmas.'"

"That's good news," said Dalton.

"Yes, the best we could have," said Jack.

THE END.

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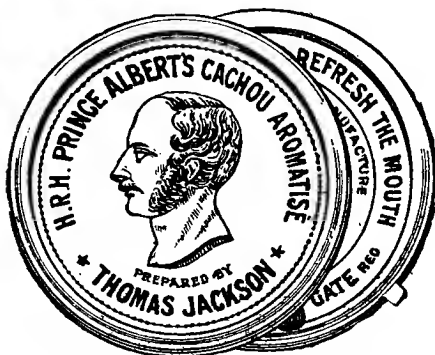
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